

**Attitudes to Fat Characters in Fantasy Literature**  
**– Cases from *The Soldier Son* by Robin Hobb and *A Song of Ice and Fire***  
**by George R. R. Martin**

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METSÄPELTO, ANNA: Attitudes to Fat Characters in Fantasy Literature

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Tutkielmassani olen tutkinut asennoitumista kolmeen lihavaan hahmoon fantasiakirjallisuudessa eli Nevare Burvelleen ja Gordiin Robin Hobbin *The Soldier Son* -trilogiassa sekä Samwell Tarlyyn George R. R. Martinin *A Song of Ice and Fire* -sarjassa. Nevare Burvellea olen käsitellyt eniten, sillä hän on ensimmäisen persoonan kertoja *The Soldier Son*issa ja siten hänestä on eniten materiaalia.

Kaikki kolme hahmoa ovat nuoria miehiä, joiden on tarkoitus olla sotilaita tai sotureita, ja heidän lihavuutensa vaikeuttaa heidän mahdollisuuksiaan siihen. Heihin ja yleisesti ottaen miehisyyteen kohdistuvat odotukset ovat erityisen ankarat fantasiakirjallisuudessa, sillä usein miesten odotetaan olevan fyysisesti vahvoja kestääkseen fantasiamaailmassa vallitsevat olosuhteet. Toiset hahmot pitävät Nevarea, Gordia ja Samwelliä kelpaamattomina sotilaiksi tai sotureiksi heidän ulkomuotonsa vuoksi, mikä myös kyseenalaistaa heidän maskuliinisuutensa. Heidän kuvitellaan olevan laiskoja, ylensyöviä ja vastenmielisiä niin seksuaalisesti kuin muutenkin pelkästään, koska he ovat lihavia. Vastoinikäymisistä huolimatta kaikki pääsevät toteuttamaan itseään sotilaan tai soturin uralla ja he pääsevät osoittamaan älykkyytensä monin tavoin.

Avainsanat: Fantasiakirjallisuus, lihavuus, maskuliinisuus, Robin Hobb, G. R. R. Martin

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
1. Theory.....	7
2.1 Fantasy Literature.....	7
2.1.1 Defining Fantasy Literature.....	7
2.1.2 Development and Subgenres .....	13
2.1.3 Fantasy and Reality .....	16
2.2 Overweight and Obesity .....	19
2.2.1 Obesity and its Health Consequences.....	19
2.2.2 Gaining and Losing Weight.....	23
2.2.3 Attitudes to Obesity and Body Image.....	29
3. The Case of Nevare Burvelle .....	35
3.1 Nevare's Attitudes and Observations .....	35
3.2 Ridicule .....	40
3.3 Nevare's Father and Family .....	42
3.4 The Townspeople of Gettys .....	50
3.5 The Specks .....	55
4. The Cases of Gord and Samwell .....	61
4.1 Gord.....	61
4.2 Samwell Tarly .....	70
5. Conclusions .....	77
Bibliography: .....	81

## 1. Introduction

During the last few decades obesity has become more and more common in the Western countries. As many as 60 % of the inhabitants of the USA in 2005 were overweight and 25 % obesily overweight (Oliver 2005, 1). Many European countries are not far behind, and the situation is even worse in many small island nations in the Pacific (Power & Schulkin 2009, 31-32).

However, these numbers are not often reflected in contemporary entertainment industry or art: the percentage of fat characters in magazines and TV-series is much lower than in reality (Pedersen 2010, 7). In addition the characters which are overweight are usually shown in a negative way and are often ridiculed upon (Pedersen 2010, 8).

Fantasy literature, particularly such fantasy that is set in a different world from ours, has often been seen as escapist entertainment and contributing little to serious literary study or to our understanding of our world. I disagree with this view. Even though fantasy cannot be seen as realistic fiction it does offer different ways to approach contemporary issues and one of the most common issues discussed in fantasy is difference between individuals and peoples. Very commonly this difference is a difference between nations or races, discussed both positively and negatively, but it can also be something else. Even obesity and overweight can be discussed in fantasy literature. There are a few very interesting contemporary fantasy series which present important fat characters, even a fat protagonist. These are *The Soldier Son* – trilogy by Robin Hobb and *A Song of Ice and Fire* –series by George R. R. Martin.

During the last four decades fantasy literature has gained much popularity and one of the most read authors of today is the writer Robin Hobb (born 1952 in California, USA) who published her first book, *Assassin's Apprentice*, under that pseudonym in 1995. Her real name is Margaret Astrid Lindholm Ogden and she has also published literary works under the name

Megan Lindholm. Her strength as a writer lies not in action or sense of wonder but in very life-like characters who have faults and clear motives for their actions.

The popularity of George R. R. Martin (born 1948 in New Jersey, USA) is at least as high as that of Robin Hobb's. He started writing already in the 1970's but his most popular work has been *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The first part of the series, *A Game of Thrones*, was published in 1996 and Martin continues writing the last two parts of the series. *A Game of Thrones* has also been made into a TV-series by HBO in 2011 now going on season three.

Fantasy is not among the most popular genres for research in general. There are a few famous authors whose work is studied more widely – J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, J. K. Rowling, and Ursula Le Guin foremost. There are just a few studies concentrating on Robin Hobb's work and only one, as far as I was able to find, on *The Soldier Son* –trilogy but even that does not talk about obesity. Siobhan Carroll wrote an article "Honor-Bound: Self and Other in the Honor Culture of Robin Hobb's Soldier Son Series" in 2007. However, it does not come as a surprise that there is little on the trilogy as the first part was published as recently as in 2005. There is no academic study done on George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* and hardly anything on his other works.

In my thesis I am going to study attitudes to obese characters in fantasy literature. I have chosen *The Soldier Son* –trilogy by Robin Hobb and *A Song of Ice and Fire* –series by George R. R. Martin as my primary materials because they contain several fat characters in prominent roles. My research questions are the following: What kinds of attitudes are shown towards fat characters in fantasy and what kind of treatment do those lead to? What makes these attitudes and treatments particularly typical to fantasy opposed to other genres? I will look at points made in the novels about overweight and some related characteristics, which will be discussed in the theory sections, and use the theoretical background to analyze them.

I am going to give somewhat more space for *The Soldier Son* –trilogy than *A Song of Ice and Fire* –series because *The Soldier Son* –trilogy features an obese main character who is also the first person narrator of the story and presents a very wide view of attitudes to obesity in the form of events he has to go through because of his obesity. In addition, there is another prominent fat character, Gord, who will be analyzed.

The use of a few terms needs some clarification. I will use “overweight” and “obesity” as medical terms which are more clearly defined in the theory section about overweight and obesity. They mean having extra fat a certain amount. In the analysis I will use the term “fatness” more commonly meaning having more fat in the body than is commonly accepted but the amount is not clinically measured so that it would be difficult to talk about either overweight or obesity because the text does not make the distinction clear.

Next I will present the both series in some length. I will have to use relatively much space for this because the basics of a fantasy story cannot be explained as quickly as those of a realistic story where one can simply state the geographic area and the era where it is set and most readers would have a good amount of background information about the work at hand. With fantasy which is set in a different world the explaining takes some more effort than that.

*The Soldier Son* –trilogy (*Shaman’s Crossing* 2005, *Forest Mage* 2006 and *Renegade’s Magic* 2007) is set in a pseudo-Victorian fantasy world. By pseudo-Victorian I mean a world where there is budding industry, firearms are in general use, the idea of propriety is very strict and people are to some extent driven to action by “the white man’s burden” to educate the savage peoples. One can also see the influence of the American Frontier and the Wild West in the work. The country where most of the events take place is called Gernia. The name might refer to Germany since the situation before the first novel starts resembles that of Germany’s after the loss in the First World War: Gernia has lost a war and some provinces and trade to their western neighbor. However, the new king is not planning another war against them but

sets his eyes to the east instead where less civilized tribes of Plainsmen inhabit the Plains. Thus start the conquest wars of the Plains in the east and they are taken as a part of Gernia. Even though Gernia has had nearly no social mobility, after the successful conquest the king decides to elevate new nobility from the army officers who are second sons of noblemen themselves. The protagonist, Nevare Burvelle, is the second son of such a new nobleman and because of the birth order he is destined to become a soldier, and becoming a good cavalla officer also becomes his dream.

*The Soldier Son* –trilogy discusses difference at many levels. At the heart of the story there is a clash of two peoples: the Gernians and the Specks who live east of the Plains. The Gernian king decides to build a road through the plains and the Barrier Mountains to the sea beyond them but that area is the home of the Speck people who appear to be primitive on the surface but simply have a different way of life than the Gernians. Gernians do not believe in magic. They know that it exists because the Plainspeople sometimes use it. However, even the presence of iron destroys that magic and because the Gernians use iron they think that magic cannot harm them or affect them in any way. They see it as simply useless to themselves. The Specks on the other hand use magic and believe in its power. They have mages called Great Ones who can store magic in the fat of their bodies and thus the fatter the mage the stronger he or she is. The conflict between the peoples comes from the fact that the Gernians want to build their road straight through the grove where the Specks ancestor trees, literary trees where many of their ancestors continue to live, grow and the Gernians will not believe that anything such as ancestor trees can exist.

The protagonist is caught between this fight. In his youth during the first novel he is introduced to the Plainspeople's spirit world. There he is claimed by the Speck magic and half of his soul is left there to be trained in the ways of the Magic. His other half returns uncertain of what has happened and continues with his life of becoming a Gernian military officer. He

travels to study in the capital at the King's Cavalla Academy. There he meets a fat fellow cadet, Gord, who becomes his friend of sorts despite his fatness. The Academy is hit by the Speck plague, a disease spread by the Specks as a means to weaken their enemy Gernians. Also Nevare catches it. At his sick bed near death Nevare revisits the spirit world and returns with the lost part of his soul. He recovers from his illness but with an unusual side effect. Most plague survivors remain weak and thin but Nevare gains huge amounts of weight: without his knowing, he is turning into a Great One of the Specks and of course very few of his fellow Gernians will believe it. This happens right at the end of the first book.

The most important obese character in the trilogy is clearly Nevare and there is most material on him. In addition, there is Nevare's fellow cadet from the King's Cavalla Academy, Gord, who is also very fat and who has to some extent similar experiences as Nevare because of his fatness. Some of the other Speck Great Ones will also be briefly presented and discussed.

*A Song of Ice and Fire* –series is more traditional when it comes to the setting since we are talking about a pseudo-medieval fantasy world. However, like in *The Soldier Son*, magic does not play a significant role in the people's everyday life even though some magical events do take place. Most of the events are set in The Seven Kingdoms, which is basically a small continent reaching from eternally frozen north to south where snow never falls. In the north the country is limited to a giant wall of ice which protects the lands from wildling tribes and something else which has been forgotten during the millennia when the wall has stood there. About a dozen years before the events of the first book, there was a bloody revolution war where the old king was killed with most of his family and one of the revolutionary lords took the throne but the country was still restless and many lords uncertain of their loyalties. When this king Robert dies during the first book, it plunges The Seven Kingdoms into a war with



more than just two armies. Thus the series concentrates on struggles of power and survival at the claws of war.

The series is told from the perspectives of several characters which are often on different sides and in different locations. One of these characters is Samwell Tarly, a fat boy of noble birth who is sent north to the icy Wall to be one of its guardians by his father. His fat is not of any magical origin but his treatment resembles to some extent what Nevare has to go through though he also shares several characteristics with Gord, too.

## 2. Theory

### 2.1 Fantasy Literature

In this part I intend to give a short account of fantasy literature as a genre. That is not a simple task as critics have different opinions and perhaps also because of the young age of the modern fantasy genre for which the definitions may be out of date, far too wide or even nearly invalid. There is not very much good critical literature on fantasy literature.

I will first give a definition of fantasy as a genre mainly along the lines of Brian Laetz and Joshua J. Johnston's essay "What is Fantasy?" which I find to be the best and most comprehensive definition of fantasy which I have encountered this far and summarize some other very prominent features of fantasy which matter to my study. I will also introduce other views of the genre briefly. Secondly, I will introduce the development of fantasy as a genre and mention something about its subgenres and problems with the classifications. Thirdly, I will discuss the relationship fantasy has with reality and how this helps us to discuss phenomena such as obesity in fantasy.

#### 2.1.1 Defining Fantasy Literature

Fantasy as a literary genre has boomed during the last four decades and particularly from 1990's onward. Deborah O'Keefe (2004, 12) gives some figures about children's fantasy: "The third edition of Ruth Lynn's *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults*, which appeared in 1989, listed 3,300 books published in the United States since 1900. In 1995, the fourth edition covered 4,800 books, an increase of 45 percent in only six years." She also mentions that 1995 was before Harry Potter -books which have increased the popularity of the genre even further (O'Keefe 2004, 13). And not all fantasy is meant for children or young

adults. There is a large number of works of fantasy which are written for adult audiences though quite often both children and adults read the same works of fantasy as has happened with J. K. Rowling and Philip Pullman recently and with J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis for some decades (O'Keefe 2004, 13).

As mentioned above, fantasy literature is a relatively new genre even though Dennis M. Kratz (quoted by Mathews 2002, 2) has stated that “fantasy forms the mainstream of the Western literature until the Renaissance” which I claim is both true and false. In old literature myth and reality often mixed, and fantasy is exactly the genre in which that happens continuously, but we do not have an unbroken continuum from the pre-Renaissance literature to modern fantasy. But I will discuss fantasy and myths further later.

Fantasy has several genres which are closely related to it. The most prominent ones are science fiction, supernatural horror, mythology, religious fiction and paranormal romance. There is also a group of works which stands at the line between realism and fantasy. I will soon give tools with which to find differences between these. However, it is worth mentioning that some critics like O'Keefe have the tendency to bunch these all (with the exception of religious literature) into one hypernymic category called fantasy.

Firstly Brian Laetz and Joshua J. Johnston (2008, 1) point out that fantasy is not merely a literary genre but a transmedial genre. In addition to novels and short-stories and everything in between them, fantasy exists in movies, television series, visual art, and role-playing, board games, and computer games (Laetz & Johnston 2008, 1).

“Fantastic narratives are essentially fictional” (Laetz & Johnston 2008, 1). That is true for all literature as all literary works, even those based on real events, are fictional to some extent. However, it is even truer for fantasy which is not even mimetic, that is, imitating reality (Jackson 1981, 33-34). Fantasy creates its own internal reality which imitates the reality which we know only to a limited extent. This departure from reality is done with some

supernatural content which plays an important role in the narrative; a minor detail cannot play the part (Laetz & Johnston 2008, 2). In addition the supernatural content cannot be simply allegorical, it cannot exist for fun or mockery and it cannot be simply absurd (Laetz & Johnston 2008, 2). The supernatural content should neither be explained with science (now existing or speculative) nor should it be naturalized or mainly meant to frighten the readers (Laetz & Johnston 2008, 4). The existence of this supernatural content is the most defining feature of fantasy.

There is, however, the question of knowing what is supernatural and what is not. According to Laetz and Johnston (2008, 3), all things commonly understood as supernatural at the time of creation of the narrative will do for fantasy even if the content would later be proven real. Laetz and Johnston (2008, 3) give dragons as an example: we assume that there are no dragons and never were but even if it was proved that they did exist or still exist, all the numerous works of fantasy which feature dragons would not turn into realistic fiction even if dragons were the main supernatural content. However, the later works after the discovery of dragons could be counted as something else than fantasy if other criteria for fantasy are not met.

Even though Mathews (Mathews 2002, 1) writes that: “as a literary genre, modern fantasy is clearly related to the magical stories of myth, legend, fairy tale, and folklore from all over the world”, the relationship is very one sided as fantasy has the tendency to borrow from myth, legend, fairy tale, and folklore as has happened for example to the legend of King Arthur in the works of Marion Zimmer Bradley, T. H. White, Bernard Cornwell, and others. The original legend cannot be called fantasy even though it certainly is fantastical but the rewritings can be called fantasy. If we think of it the other way, fantasy is unlikely to ever become myth so there is a difference between them. However, if we follow the definition Brian Laetz and Joshua J. Johnston (3, 2008) offer, the belief of the original audience is the

key concept which separates fantasy and myth. We at least can assume (though certain knowledge cannot be obtained) that the original audiences of the legend of Arthur believed that the supernatural content of the legend had been true in some distant past. No one in their right mind believes that modern fantasy stories represent real events.

Belief takes also fantasy and contemporary religious fiction apart. There are works which include supernatural content such as angels for example but since at least part of the initial audience believes in them, the works cannot be called fantasy if no other criteria for fantasy are met (Laetz & Johnston 2008, 3). A good example of fantasy with some Christian content is *Neverwhere* by Neil Gaiman which presents the fallen angel Islington as the villain linking the book to Christianity but the hidden and magical underground London, which is the main setting of the story, has nothing to do with religion and it is more prominent in the story than the fact that the book contains an angel, which makes it fantasy rather than religious fiction. On the other hand, if one day Christianity would be extinct, later works based on it could be fantasy as has happened with for example Greek and Nordic myths about gods in modern times because the contemporary audience does not believe in them (Laetz & Johnston 2008, 3).

One last condition for fantasy involves the storylines. While adventure stories are very common in fantasy, Laetz and Johnston (Laetz & Johnston 2008, 4) point out that not all fantasy include adventuring while trying to complete some quest like in *The Lord of the Rings* -trilogy. If we take Harry Potter up once again, we see that most of the plot does not include adventuring but rather solving mysteries with a dash of “coming-of-age school drama” as Laetz and Johnston put it (2008, 4). However, there tends to be relatively much action involved in solving the mystery as there is also action involved in the quest of destroying the One Ring in *The Lord of the Rings* (Laetz & Johnston 2008, 4). Thus it would seem plausible

to conclude that a work of fantasy includes action in the plot lines (Laetz & Johnston 2008, 4).

Laetz and Johnston summarize their definition of fantasy as follows:

On our view, fantastic narratives are fictional action stories with prominent supernatural content that is inspired by myth, legends, or folklore. Further, this content is believed by few or no audience members... Moreover, it is not naturalized, solely allegorical, merely parodic, simply absurd, or primarily meant to frighten audiences. (Laetz & Johnston 2008, 4)

Furthermore, while not essential to the core definition of fantasy, it is worth mentioning that fantasy is a very masculine genre. The readership and authorship of fantasy are about equally male and female but the great majority of fantasy protagonists are male, even more so if the work is meant for adult audiences. While not having any real statistics, as a person who has read a pretty extensive amount of fantasy I would estimate that fantasy meant for adults has female protagonists in only 10-20 % of the works. Even then many females have strong masculine features like Jill in the *Deverry* cycle by Katharine Kerr. She wears mainly the clothes of a boy and is equal in using a sword with most men she encounters. Her culture does not approve of her but her unconventionality comes from the fact that she has grown up with her mercenary father and has needed to be able to take care of herself when he has been away fighting. Then there are books like *The Hobbit* which does not include a single mentioned female character.

It is hard to pin down one single reason for this phenomenon of masculinity but one of them might have to do with the very typical pseudo medieval environment which often also includes relatively conservative gender roles and values. In most of these pseudo medieval worlds women are not able to be as active as in the modern world. Thus males would be able to experience and travel the fantasy world more freely and because of their normally stronger

physique they would be able to survive action more easily. Men are expected to be warriors or have some other strengths.

However, it can often be hard to tell who the protagonist of a fantasy story really is because it often follows several simultaneous plot lines. The *Song of Ice and Fire* for example follows a good number of characters of whom some are women though they are a minority in all the books except the first one in which four of the eight point of view characters are female.

Even though definitions of fantasy may differ between researchers, all contemporary scholars agree on the fact that fantasy contains something supernatural which is prominent in the story. Some of the early research on fantasy does not agree even on that. The competing theory and definition to fantasy comes from the 1970's and early 1980's and it was introduced by Tzvetan Todorov in *The Fantastic – A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1973) and continued by e.g. Rosemary Jackson and T. E. Apter. According to Jackson (1981, 34) fantasy literature relies upon the conventions of realistic fiction and then breaks it with something unreal. The narrator, protagonist or the reader cannot be certain whether the events are real (supernatural) or not (illusion, hallucination). Jackson refers to Todorov who writes that “the purely fantastic text establishes absolute hesitation in protagonist and reader: they can neither come to terms with the unfamiliar events described, nor dismiss them as supernatural phenomena” (Jackson 1981, 27). I need to point out that they use both terms fantasy and fantastic interchangeably, not only fantasy. Jackson's examples of writers of fantasy are writers like Dostoevsky, Edgar Allan Poe and Franz Kafka (Jackson, 16) whose works might not be strictly realistic but are not fantasy if we follow the lines of Tolkien or more concretely the publishing industry of today because it is not clear whether there is something supernatural there or not. Jackson does mention Tolkien several times but she classifies his

works to “marvelous fiction”. She writes that: “The world of fairy story, romance, magic, supernaturalism is one belonging to marvelous narrative” (Jackson, 33).

One of the major contributors to modern fantasy has been J. R. R. Tolkien both as a writer of fantasy but as one of the first scholars to discuss the genre. Tolkien’s essay “On Fairy-Stories” is among the founding texts concerning fantasy literature though he mostly calls them fairy-stories instead of fantasy.

### **2.1.2 Development and Subgenres**

The modern fantasy which I am studying might not be particularly old as a genre but it has very deep roots. In his book, Mathews quotes Dennis M. Kratz who has said that fantasy has formed the mainstream literature of the Western world until the Renaissance (Mathews 2002, 2). This is true in the sense that the oldest tales which have survived to our days include features which we would nowadays find almost only in fantasy but as was discussed in the previous chapter, while much of the old literature is certainly fantastic, it is not fantasy. In a sense fantasy forms a continuum of stories which share supernatural content from the ancient tales to modern fantasy texts even though the name and label of fantasy is relatively new and can correctly be used only of the relatively recent works.

Fantastic features were separated from serious literature around the end of the Middle Ages. Around that time the genre which Michael Moorcock calls Chivalric Romances emerged. He writes that it borrowed much from the legends of Arthur and Charlemagne but rarely had the same sophistication of plot or language. They were pure entertainment for the upper classes of Europe and had the reputation of relatively poor literature but they were fantasy in the sense that they did contain much supernatural content which did not try to imitate reality (Moorcock 1987, 27). *Don Quixote* by Cervantes is a parody of Chivalric



Romances and because of the fact that it was clearly a parody, it enjoyed more prestige and is still read today while most of Chivalric Romances are forgotten (Moorcock 1987, 27-29).

Magic re-emerged in literature with the Gothic in the late eighteenth century (Moorcock 1987, 42) which gave also a foundation for the actual fantasy literature. The most important writers of the early era, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, are George MacDonald and William Morris who created the so called high literary fantasy, also in some contexts known as epic fantasy (Mathews 2002, 16) and they can be called the first actual fantasy authors. They influenced the writers of the early twentieth century, including J. R. R. Tolkien whose first novel, *The Hobbit*, was published in 1937 and probably also Robert E. Howard and his tales of Conan the Barbarian. The genre started to gain greater popularity a couple decades after the publishing of *The Lord of the Rings* –trilogy by Tolkien, in the 1970's, when a growing number of new writers began to publish their fantasy novels and the boom has increased ever since as was shown in the example of children's fantasy by O'Keefe in the previous chapter.

It can be said that there is a tight tradition within fantasy as Laetz and Johnston (2008, 6) state that there are only a few basic styles in the genre within which the authors operate. The most influential styles are high or epic fantasy in the style of Tolkien or the sword and sorcery from Robert E. Howard's Conan-stories (Laetz & Johnston 2008, 6). Michael Moorcock even complains about the Tolkien and Howard imitations which formed a large number of commercial fantasy when he wrote his essays in the late 1980's (Moorcock 1987, 15).

Most sources tend to separate fantasy into either high fantasy or sword and sorcery. High fantasy has much emphasis on hierarchical order, nobility of character and typically a clear distinction between good and evil whereas sword and sorcery is more defined by self-made heroes who earn their status by brute force (Mathews 2002, 118). In my opinion these traditions share many features but perhaps reflect some values of their origins – monarchy and

the traditions of Britain in Tolkien's case and the self-made success of America in the case of Howard.

However, dividing fantasy into only high fantasy and sword and sorcery leaves out a good number of works which are by all definitions fantasy but do not follow either tradition. A good example again would be *Neverwhere* by Neil Gaiman. The setting is no separate fantasy world but London and an underground London which is invisible to most ordinary people but into which the protagonist is sucked into by helping one of its inhabitants who had found her way into normal London. There is little of Tolkien's nobility and hierarchy nor are the conflicts solved by strength but rather by luck and cunning. Thus it would be difficult to argue that *Neverwhere* followed either of the two traditions of fantasy.

I therefore find the traditionally defined subgenres of fantasy inadequate. I would rather propose a division of fantasy into high and low fantasy which would reflect the degree of fantastic in the work. Fantasy which has a strong connection to reality or history would be categorized as low fantasy and fantasy which has a high concentration of supernatural elements would be considered high fantasy. Like always, the borderline cases would be difficult to categorize but it is not the aim of this thesis to do that.

I would claim that both *Soldier Son* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* are rather low than high fantasy if we follow the definitions of low and high fantasy which I gave above. Both works do fit into the continuum of fantasy which has followed the success of *The Lord of the Rings* but the amount of supernatural features is quite low in both. The common folk barely even believe in magic. In addition we find a good mixture of Tolkienian and Howardian features in both: there may be a hierarchical order but there is little nobility or a clear distinction between good and evil as most characters are mainly interested in their own or their own family's or own people's wellbeing which would make it hard to define them as either Tolkienian high fantasy or Howardian sword and sorcery. Both works are about human affairs which are in

places touched by magic, magical beings or the gods which normally affect people's lives very rarely.

### **2.1.3 Fantasy and Reality**

There are two distinct matters to discuss when talking about fantasy literature and reality. Firstly, there is the relationship which fantasy literature has with the contemporary reality. Secondly, there is the inner reality of fantasy which affects how characters as well as readers accept phenomena inside a fantasy story.

The relationship between fantasy literature and contemporary reality has always been one of the most debated features of fantasy literature. One of the most common arguments against literary fantasy is escapism which takes the reader away from reality and the so called important matters of life replacing reality with impossibilities of magic and the supernatural. The fact that a fantasy story could never happen in reality is seen as a purely negative feature.

There are, however, people who disagree with this view: Anne Cranny-Francis (1990, 75) quotes in her book, *Feminist Fiction*, fantasy author Ursula LeGuin who says: "For fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true". Because fantasy is not bound to the contemporary real world, it can be used to enlighten the borders of the reality which we perceive and the reader can explore the limits of reality because s/he is not confined by it (Cranny-Francis 1990, 75-76). Mathews (2002, 1, 4) writes that even though the genres which have common features with fantasy like science fiction have a more deep connection to reality than fantasy, which tries to radically depart from it, "modern fantasy is characterized by a narrative frame that unites timeless mythic patterns with contemporary individual experiences". This means basically that fantasy can be easily used to discuss the problems of contemporary reality because it is able to use different names for people and phenomena. This

way the readers are not necessarily bound by the prejudices which they would possibly have if the real names were used. This way the readers can see our reality from the outside or the perspective of an outsider. This effect can be called the mirroring effect because the contemporary phenomena are not in fantasy as such but simply as reflections of phenomena from reality. I am not claiming that all fantasy literature uses the mirroring effect because some of it is simply escapist entertainment but very good fantasy really can discuss serious themes or even do both at the same time. Colin Manlove (1999, 49) points out that early writers of secondary world fantasy such as J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis rejected modernity in their fantasy worlds and often portrayed evil in scientific terms but nevertheless did discuss several social themes in their works. However, typically the themes discussed in fantasy literature handle relatively timeless issues such as racial matters, love and commitment, good and evil, or power relations. The effects of a financial crisis on individuals will not be the first theme to discuss in fantasy literature but in some form even that might find its way in the genre. In fact, there is a mention in *A Song of Ice and Fire* about bad inflation of money during wartime which makes the lives of normal city dwellers very problematic as food becomes available only to those with either a lot of money or something else very valuable to trade for food.

The second approach to fantasy and reality concerns the reality inside a fantasy world. By a fantasy world I mean any settings of a fantasy story – settings which try to imitate either contemporary or historical reality because the presence of a supernatural feature inevitably alters the inner reality of the world around it at least in a minor way as well as secondary fantasy worlds which are not in any physical connection to our reality. J. R. R. Tolkien (2001, 47) uses the term “inner consistency of reality” in his essay “On Fairy-Stories” to refer to the reality of a fantasy world. Fantasy worlds can operate either very strictly by the rules of our world or the connections to our reality can be relatively loose but the most important feature

is that the author has to define clearly what is possible and what is impossible in the fantasy world he or she has created and be consistent with those rules throughout the literary work. All the rules do not have to be written out for the reader. As long as the rules are followed, the inner consistency of reality holds and the reader is able to understand and relate to even the strangest events and believe them in their context inside the story because the inner consistency of reality makes them true inside the story. If these rules are broken without a good explanation, the story can easily become absurd or even incomprehensible and the reader cannot relate well to the story. It is typical that there is some way around the rules which is later then explained but the explanation is necessary in these cases.

The inner consistency of reality has to be applied to every aspect of the fantasy story. Supernatural features are not the only things which need clear rules to work though they are very important as they are one major feature distinguishing fantasy from contemporary reality. For example if it has been stated that it is impossible to raise dead back to living, it should not be done in any part of the story unless the writer can explain why it was possible after all. Equally if it has been shown that a character can create fire with magic, the ability should be available all the time unless the writer can give a good explanation why it cannot be done in some circumstances. On the other hand, such things as cultures and cultural values inside a fantasy story need to be made consistent just as well as any supernatural content.

The inner consistency of reality is also important for the mirroring effect fantasy can have. If the fantasy world works well with its inner rules, the reader is able to believe the contents of the story within its context and when the reader believes the contents, the mirroring effect can work.

Both reality concepts are needed in the following analysis. The mirroring effect shows how simple the view of fatness in contemporary reality can be when it is shown from a

different perspective. The inner consistency of reality is needed to understand the attitudes to fatness in some cases.

## **2.2 Overweight and Obesity**

In this section I am going to concentrate on obesity and overweight. In the first part I will look at it from biological and medical perspectives exploring what it actually is and what it does in our bodies and to our bodies. In the second part I will briefly introduce the evolutionary reasons why overweight is such an issue right now: which things affect our weight and which things cause weight gain and what is done to lose weight. In the final part I will look into common thought patterns concerning overweight and obese people and eating starting from Antiquity until modern times in order to find out why overweight and obesity are so disliked.

### **2.2.1 Obesity and its Health Consequences**

Fat is an essential part of our bodies. About 30 % of a normal-weight woman's body weight is adipose tissue (fat tissue) and about 20 % of a normal-weight man's body weight is adipose tissue (Power & Schulkin 2009, 268). Adipose tissue acts as a reservoir of extra energy but contrary to what was previously believed, adipose tissue is not simply a passive storage of extra energy. That is, indeed, one of its most important functions but in addition it works as an endocrine organ which excretes and stores certain hormones (Power & Schulkin, 2009). Fat is also connected to human reproductive ability particularly in females – very lean women tend to have irregular or absent ovulatory cycles (Power & Schulkin 2009, 283).

Fat is a convenient way of storing energy in a body even though it is not the only one. Humans store a certain amount of energy as sugar in the liver and the muscles and some sugar

constantly flows in the blood but the amounts which can be stored this way are relatively small and a relatively large amount of water has to be tied with the sugar molecules which makes sugar heavy to store compared to fat (Power & Schulkin 2009, 158). In addition one gram of fat contains about twice as much energy as one gram of sugar which means that for storing energy in a convenient and light way, fat is the best option (Power & Schulkin 2009, 158).

When the amount of adipose tissue exceeds the normal limits by a margin, we start to talk about overweight and after a certain point we talk about obesity. The WHO defines overweight and obesity as follows: “Overweight and obesity are defined as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that may impair health” (WHO 2011) .

There are several non-communicable diseases which are linked to overweight and obesity. Such are different metabolic diseases like type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, stroke, hyperlipidemia or dyslipidemia, nonalcoholic fatty liver, certain types of cancer, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea, asthma, depression, and some reproductive disorders (Power & Schulkin 2009, 35). The list may seem long but as Oliver (2005, 26) points out, “nearly all the studies linking obesity with disease are epidemiological studies; that is, they are simply surveys of the population and not clinical experiments”. That basically means that the studies have only found an association between these diseases and obesity but cannot tell whether overweight and obesity are the reason for these or if it is simply a co-symptom.

It is, nevertheless, worth mentioning that not all fat appears to carry the same risks to health. Several studies have discovered that abdominal obesity is associated with a higher risk of developing several of the diseases like type 2 diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia and cardiovascular disease (Power & Schulkin 2009, 261, quoting Karelis et al., Goodpaster et al., Racette et al., Van Pelt et al.)

By far the most commonly used way to measure overweight is the body mass index (BMI for short). It is used by doctors, government officials and health organizations (Oliver 2005, 16). BMI measures an adult person's weight/height ratio and it is defined as the weight in kilograms divided by the square of the height in meters ( $\text{kg/m}^2$ ) (Ross 2005, 92).

BMI was originally invented in the 1830's by a Belgian astronomer Adolphe Quetelet. It had nothing to do with measuring fatness or health. Quetelet was interested in applying mathematical laws to human beings and he measured and weighed a large number of French and Scottish army conscripts and found that their weight/height ratio formed a bell curve. The weights of the persons in the middle of the curve matched their height in meters squared and so the BMI was created. (Oliver 2005, 16-17) It is worth noting that even though Quetelet made his own conclusions that the middle of the bell curve would be the "ideal" weight of a person, there was no implication that the BMI would say anything about a person's health. It was simply a classifying tool (Oliver 2005, 19).

However, the wide use of the BMI did not start in the 1830's but a century later in insurance companies. Louis Dublin who worked at Metropolitan Life Insurance Company as a statistician "started to chart the death rates of its policy holders in the 1940s using a height-to-weight index" (Oliver 2005, 19). He discovered that slimmer persons often lived longest which lead to promoting slimness as a way to long life and this was adopted by many doctors, epidemiologists and government officials (Oliver 2005, 19). No studies were made which would tell whether it was weight that was responsible for the earlier deaths or some other factor such as little exercise, unhealthy diet, genetic factors or something else, but body fat as the cause was accepted widely (Oliver 2005, 19).

BMI system has the advantage that it is easy to use and the results are quickly readable. Steward (2010, 27) points out that BMI is good for comparing populations "as height and weight can easily be measured in a census".



In 1995 the WHO ([http://apps.who.int/bmi/index.jsp?introPage=intro\\_3.html](http://apps.who.int/bmi/index.jsp?introPage=intro_3.html)) published its classifications of BMI limits which are here below:

**Table 1: The International Classification of adult underweight, overweight and obesity according to BMI**

Classification	BMI(kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	
	Principal cut-off points	Additional cut-off points
<b>Underweight</b>	<b>&lt;18.50</b>	<b>&lt;18.50</b>
Severe thinness	<16.00	<16.00
Moderate thinness	16.00 - 16.99	16.00 - 16.99
Mild thinness	17.00 - 18.49	17.00 - 18.49
<b>Normal range</b>	<b>18.50 - 24.99</b>	<b>18.50 - 22.99</b>
		<b>23.00 - 24.99</b>
<b>Overweight</b>	<b>≥25.00</b>	<b>≥25.00</b>
Pre-obese	25.00 - 29.99	25.00 - 27.49
		27.50 - 29.99
<b>Obese</b>	<b>≥30.00</b>	<b>≥30.00</b>
Obese class I	30.00 - 34.99	30.00 - 32.49
		32.50 - 34.99
Obese class II	35.00 - 39.99	35.00 - 37.49
		37.50 - 39.99
Obese class III	≥40.00	≥40.00

*Source: Adapted from WHO, 1995, WHO, 2000 and WHO 2004.*

To illustrate this a little, for a person who is 170 cm tall the normal range of weight would be from 53.5 to 72.3 kilos. Weight between 72.4 and 86.6 kilos is considered overweight and over 86.7 kilos would be Obese class I.

Nevertheless, BMI has also received much criticism which is partly due to its origin which was briefly discussed above.

BMI does not differentiate between lean and fat mass of the body and because muscle is heavier than fat, muscular people like many athletes can be termed overweight or even obese without having excess adipose tissue (Oliver 2005, 21). BMI does not differentiate between

persons of different size frames either (Steward 2010, 27). BMI “attributes excess mass to fat” as Steward states even if the person in question would not have any excess adipose tissue (2010, 27). For this reason Michael Jordan is “overweight” and Arnold Schwarzenegger is “obese” as Oliver mentions (2005, 16). “... It is not because of their poor fitness or precarious health; it is because a handful of people are defining these terms in ridiculous ways”, Oliver writes (Oliver 2005, 16). While I will not go much deeper into this debate, I will only mention that Oliver states that BMI levels were set artificially low because the experts setting them got money from pharmaceutical companies which manufacture weight loss drugs (Oliver 2005, 28-30).

### **2.2.2 Gaining and Losing Weight**

Overweight and obesity have been increasing in most parts of the world during the last few decades (Power & Schulkin 2009, 21). “There have been obese people through history, but for most of that time obesity has been rare and unusual”, Power and Schulkin note (2009, 21). Throughout history undernourishment has been more common. Many different factors have been blamed for the increased weight from technological inventions to moral decay but no answer has been found (Gard & Wright, 2005).

Basically weight gain is simple mathematics: if the amount of energy eaten as food exceeds energy used for a sustained period, a person gains weight (Power & Schulkin, 2009 154). This works also vice versa: if the amount of energy intake is less than energy used for a sustained period, the person loses weight. Unfortunately, life is not mathematics.

It can be said that a part of our weight is determined by our genes and biological coping mechanisms. Some scientists estimate that between 30 to 70 % of our body weight is determined by our genes (Oliver 2005, 105). Power and Schulkin (2009, 241) write that even though the human body regulates body weight, the regulation seems to be asymmetric. “Loss

of body weight (sustained negative energy balance) is defended against more tightly than gain of body weight (sustained positive energy balance). This makes intrinsic evolutionary sense. For much of our evolutionary history, food intake was controlled by external rather than internal factors” (Power & Schulkin 2009, 241). This means that because there usually has been rather too little food than too much of it, there has been little disadvantage in being able to effectively store fat. Usually a person did not become obese because even though there were times of abundant food, sometime after that came leaner times when extra weight was lost. Oliver (2005, 8) states that “From a biological perspective, fatness is simply a protective mechanism against an irregular food supply.”

However, in the modern Western world this biological coping system does us more damage than good. We now live in a world where there is more food than we need. It is often also very dense in energy, it costs relatively little, it is easy to obtain, and it is very good tasting (Pool 2001, 164). Eating more than we consume is easier than ever in the history of mankind and the Western population does not need to worry about famines because food can be transported from the other side of the globe. We are unlikely to face any lean times which would regulate our weight. Our internal weight regulating systems and our environment do not fit together and a good many of us gain weight as a result (Oliver 2005, 121).

There is the theory that each person would have a range of weight to which they are genetically programmed. This is called the set-point theory (Pool 2001, 10). For some people this set point is naturally low and for some it is naturally high. There are a number of studies, the most famous ones done by Rudolph Leibel and by Ethan Sims, which have found that the metabolic rates of people who have gained weight rise making them burn more calories and often losing this extra weight without conscious dieting and that people on rigid diets start to lower their metabolic rates resisting more weight loss (Oliver 2005, 107-109). This theory would explain why it seems to be so hard for so many to maintain a lower weight after a diet

has ended and also why some people do not seem to gain any weight despite eating heavily: they are trying to keep to their natural set-point of weight (Oliver 2005, 108).

Nevertheless, while in some perspectives the set-point theory would explain relatively much about our weights, it does leave some gaps to fill. The major one is that the average weight of the Western population has risen and if the set-point theory was correct, this should not be possible. Three possible explanations have been offered: firstly, we are getting older on average and the set-point moves slowly towards the heavier side when we age (Oliver 2005, 109). Secondly, it has not been until now that most of us are able to get to our set-points because life before the last thirty years has included much more exercise and fewer opportunities to eat as much as we would like to (Oliver 2005, 109-110). Thirdly, that only the weights of the already heavy persons have risen which would indicate that most of us are close to our set-points but the heaviest are still only reaching it (Oliver 2005, 110).

While genetic and biological factors do affect our weights, most of the attention regarding the weight gain go to two factors: unhealthy food and low levels of physical activity.

There are many contradictory study results regarding food and weight. In the 1970's the first dietary guidelines were made in the USA and these were imitated by the rest of the Western countries. The guidelines promoted the use of carbohydrates from cereals, potatoes, fruit and vegetables as the primary source of energy, leaving room for lean meat, low fat dairy products and beans as a source of protein and promoting sparse use of fats, especially saturated fats from animal sources. This type of eating was believed to help in keeping the population healthy. These recommendations have not changed much over the decades but during this time the population has started to gain more weight. There are some people who blame these recommendations: they consist of too much carbohydrates (Oliver 2005, 124). There may or may not be a direct link. However, the use of these recommendations is often

given as a cure for overweight but for one reason or another they have not worked particularly well.

The enlarged portion sizes are also often blamed and it is true that for example the portions in fast food restaurants have gotten bigger, but there is no convincing evidence that portion sizes at home would have risen also (Oliver 2005, 132-133). However, there is a new phenomenon in eating that has become much more typical during the last three decades: snacking (Oliver 2005, 133). It does not automatically lead to gaining weight but unfortunately snack foods are typically rich either in sugars, fats or both making them very energy dense (Oliver 2005, 134). Especially the consumption of soft drinks has risen since the 1970's (Oliver 2005, 134).

The decreased amount of physical activity has often been blamed for the increase of obesity together with many innovations which have enabled this change like cars, dishwashers, and escalators. Manual work has also become a rarity and often is made easier by several appliances. (Oliver 2005, 144) The television and the computer are often also on the group of the blamed innovations because they increases the amount of time which is spent sitting down instead of doing more physically active activities (Oliver 2005, 148). While it is true that a more physically active lifestyle does consume more energy and that the typical Western lifestyle is not particularly active, there is little proof that the lack of physical activity would be a major culprit in the increased rates of overweight and obesity (Oliver 2005, 150). There is first of all no data about physical activity from before the increase of overweight and obesity which could be compared with data from today which makes it hard to prove the decline in exercise (Oliver 2005, 150). In addition, the amount of energy expended in physical activity relative to the energy which can be consumed as food makes the lessened physical activity an unlikely reason for the increase in overweight and obesity. As King, Colley, Byrne, Hills and Blundell (2010, 111) point out, to expend 600 kilocalories a person of

normal weight and moderate fitness would have to spend 60 minutes in heavy physical activity like running. However, it does not take more than a few minutes to eat 100 grams of chocolate which also contains about the same 600 kilocalories. This implies that it would have taken a huge amount of lessening of exercise to cause it to increase the population's weight whereas even relatively small amount of snacking causes people to get the same amount of energy, making food a more likely reason for increasing weights than the smaller amount of exercise.

There are a few medical disorders which also can cause weight gain such as hypothyroidism but they constitute a minority of all cases of weight gain.

It may be impossible to tell which of these mentioned reasons or combinations of reasons for increased rates of overweight and obesity are the main culprits. The fact remains that there are more overweight and obese people than at any point of known history. It is also a fact that many overweight, obese and even normal weight persons are using many different methods to become thinner.

The Western world today admires slimness, even thinness. Being fat is seen as a bad thing, not only due to the higher risks of developing the associated diseases but also because of the ideal body image which I will discuss more later. For these reasons numerous ways to lose weight have been developed. Nearly all of them have the basic idea either to decrease the amount of calories the body takes in or to increase the amount of calories the body consumes. The idea of restricted diet and vigorous exercise has been around for as long as there have been texts which deal with fatness and this idea is present also in the fantasy novels which I am using in the analysis.

The first thing most people try in their attempt to lose weight is dieting. There are probably hundreds of variations of this but it basically means simply that a person on a diet gets a reduced amount of energy from food either by decreasing portion sizes, leaving certain

foods out of their diet, decreasing the amounts of foods which contain either much fat or much carbohydrate, or changing their diet entirely to different foods from what they had eaten before. In most cases this will decrease the person's weight but if the changes in the diet and/or general lifestyle are not permanent, it is likely that the weight loss is not permanent.

Added exercise is also a method many try but compared to changes in the diet, this method is slow. As was mentioned above, it requires much time and effort to expend for example 600 kilocalories whereas simply leaving out some energy dense foods like 100 grams of chocolate will do the same. While increased amount of exercise may not be the perfect solution for treating overweight and obesity, Oliver (2004, 153-154) points out that exercise does have several positive health consequences even if it does not help losing any weight.

One step more radical way to try to lose weight is to go on a very low calorie diet (VLCD). In that case the diet consists only of premade meal substitutes which include all the nutrients a human being needs to maintain a good health but a very low amount of energy (Broom & Rolland 2010, 60). Usually these are not recommended for any long term use but they can be used if there is acute need to reduce someone's weight quickly for example to enable surgery and they work as starts of a diet. It is also possible to substitute only some of the daily meals with VLCD meals.

There are also a few diet drugs on the market. The ones for sale right now are orlistat (a lipase inhibitor), sibutramine (a satiety enhancer) and rimonabant (an appetite suppressant) (Broom & Rolland 2010, 60). All these drugs are shown to reduce body weight by 5-10 % in two year trials (Broom & Rolland 2010, 60). Orlistat prevents part of the eaten fat from being absorbed by the person's gut thus creating a negative energy balance. However, it can cause problems with digestion like diarrhea especially if the person using orlistat eats a considerable amount of fat. For this reason the use of orlistat has to be combined with a very low fat diet

(Broom & Rolland 2010, 61). Sibutramine enhances satiety but can increase blood pressure and cause problems with some other medications such as anti-depressants (Broom & Rolland 2010, 61). Rimonabant reduces appetite by blocking a certain receptor in the hypothalamus. Because this same receptor is also one of the “pleasure pathways”, the use of rimonabant can alter the user’s mood and it is not recommended to persons who have a history of mental disorders (Broom & Rolland 2010, 61-62). There have also been other weight loss drugs available during the history of weight loss but they have had such severe side effects that they have been removed from the market (Oliver 2005, 53).

Usually the last option for losing significant amount of weight is bariatric surgery in which the size of the person’s stomach is reduced and on some occasions also the used length of the small intestine is shortened (Broom & Rolland 2010, 62-63). This makes it impossible for the patient to eat large meals which decreases energy intake and leads to weight loss and in the cases of the shortened useful part of the small intestine it also creates malabsorption which increases the effect (Broom & Rolland 2010, 62). These operations have shown a decrease of about 30 % of body weight in two years’ trials (Broom & Rolland 2010, 62) but as Oliver (2005, 54-55) points out bariatric surgery has a high mortality rate for an optional surgery, it has several possible side effects, the patients have to stay on a special diet for the rest of their lives, and one third of the patients do not gain permanent weight loss but regain the weight over years.

### **2.2.3 Attitudes to Obesity and Body Image**

Being obese in the modern world does not imply only problems with health; it also has implications for the very nature of the obese person. Obesity is often seen as a moral failure of the individual (Hill 2011, 1). Starting already in Antiquity, there have been certain features



combined to the fat body. The most notable has been gluttony but also sloth, stupidity, and greed have been associated with obesity.

Susan Hill points out that in Antiquity gluttony and fatness were not automatically linked: there were gluttons who never became fat and fat people who did not overindulge themselves (Hill 2011, 2). Fatness was not generally seen as a bad thing until it got out of control and turned into obesity (Gilman 2004, 11). A certain plumpness was associated with prosperity, power, and a balanced and easy-going nature and it could be seen as improving health if the person got some wasting disease like tuberculosis when the extra weight could act as a life saver (Gilman 2004, 11).

However, already in the texts of Hippocrates (440-340 B.C.E.) fat is categorized as a pathology (Gilman 2004, 35). The Greek believed in the humoral theory which means that health constitutes of the balance between the four fluids of the body – blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm – which also carry certain features of temperament (Gilman 2004, 36). Fat resulted from too much phlegm in the body and was associated with paleness, laziness, inertia, coolness and a phlegmatic nature (Gilman 2004, 36). All diseases were seen as an imbalance of the fluids and all foods were attributed some of these features so eating the foods of the opposite type were believed to correct the imbalance. Because phlegm was seen as a wet and cold feature, it could be treated with warm and dry types of food (Gilman 2004, 36).

Most of the negative connotations to obesity date back to early Christian texts. St Augustine's writings were very important in this. In his writings he agonizes that he struggles daily with the desire to overindulge himself with food and drink and he cannot stop consuming them because at the same time they are essential to life unlike sexual relationships which he was able to stop altogether (Gilman 2004, 51). Control is the main word here. Augustine saw food as an enjoyable medicine which could addict and with which a person

could lose control (Gilman 2004, 51). In his thoughts the carnal pleasures of the flesh, including eating and drinking, are equal to the sins of the soul and thus giving in to the bodily desires is the same as giving in to the life of a sinner. As fat was at this point seen as a sign of a gluttonous nature, it was also a sign of a sinner (Gilman 2004, 52). “By the early modern period the religious, ascetic castigation of the body through the refusal to eat and drink, except in minute amounts, had become a sign of moral virtue in the West” (Gilman 2004, 53).

Fat has also traditionally been seen as a feminine feature (Hill 2011, 44). For this reason in past times fat in men has been seen as even more condemning than in women even though today it is women who tend to suffer more from the social stigma of fatness (Oliver 2005, 79). The reason for this is that traditionally men were seen to be rational and women emotional. To give in to gluttonous behavior was seen as giving in to one’s emotional, irrational impulses which was seen as feminine behavior (Hill 2011, 44). In addition, fat hindered the man’s ability to work and work was seen as a sign of masculinity. Without the ability to work, the man was not man enough. (Gilman 2004, 38)

Fat characters in literature have never been particularly common or they usually have a small stereotypical role like that of a nanny or a cook or an innkeeper. There are, however, some very notable fat characters like Falstaff in some of William Shakespeare’s plays. His first appearance was in *Henry IV, part 1* where he is a companion to young prince Hal. He is a big elderly knight with a good appetite for food and even better appetite for sack (a type of white wine). The character became so popular that he even got his own play, *Merry Wives of Windsor*. In *Henry IV, part 1* and 2 “(t)he comic turns of Falstaff are (...) presented as destructive, the rule of law ultimately triumphing over the rule of carnival. Falstaff is the embodiment of male obesity and represents misrule in Shakespeare’s world. He violates the norms of both masculine honor and health” (Gilman 2004, 114). In the plays Falstaff is mostly a humorous character with a twist of serious (if not morally sound) thought which

comes out for example near the end of *Henry IV, part 1* where he tells himself that honor is worth nothing and because of that he does not need to enter the battle and get himself killed (*Henry IV, part 1*). In general his character represents moral and physical decay and disease (Gilman 2004, 111-112) and as Gilman points out (2004, 150) “the definitions of masculinity in Falstaff (as soldier, knight, courtier, and lover) are compromised due to his obesity”.

However, even though gluttony and outright obesity were never favored, it could be said that a certain degree of plumpness has been seen as a rather positive feature than a negative one like Edward Jukes wrote in 1833 (quoted by Gilman 2004, 144): “Fat, when moderately diffused over the body, indicates a sound state of health, and an easy disposition, gives a symmetry to the figure, and (which by many is valued more than all these) it contributes much to the beauty of the countenance...” – until the late nineteenth century.

One of the reasons why thinness instead of plumpness became the social norm starting in the late nineteenth century was the advancement of industrial farming and storing and packing methods of food which ensured a more varied and stable food supply for most people in the western world (Oliver 2005, 66). The availability of food reduced the need for storing fat and plumpness no longer had any biological advantages which lowered its value in the population (Oliver 2005, 66).

The other reason stems from middle class values. Particularly in the USA the middle class consisted mostly of white Protestants who valued hard work, modesty and temperance instead of indulging oneself with sensual pleasures or food or drink (Oliver 2005, 67). In the environment where food was widely available, food became a new target for the middle classes: it was important to show self-control and discipline not to eat too much (Oliver 2005, 67). “The ideal of fatness was thus replaced with a new conception of physicality that better suited the concerns with rationality, efficiency, and self-discipline of an industrial age. Among the American and European middle classes, this meant slimming the idealized body

from a sedentary girth to a mobile thinness”, Oliver explains (2005, 68). “Meanwhile body fat became infused with its more contemporary connotations: an indicator of a weak will and mind, a marker of sloth, and a badge denoting the failure of self-control and restraint” (Oliver 2005, 68). A thin body became a marker of moral fortitude (Oliver 2005, 68).

Such things as the expanding markets of magazines with a heavy emphasis on photographs of noticeably slim people and mass market made clothing with standard sizes also affected the emergence of a standardized body size image (Oliver 2005, 69-70).

This ideal was suspended for a couple of decades during the Great Depression and World War II but started to reemerge in the 1950’s (Oliver 2005, 70). Modern changes in lifestyle and professions started to affect body image at this point. Before the 1960’s a large portion of the population had still been working in physically demanding professions but when sedentary indoor jobs and labor saving innovations started to replace physical labor, it also changed the way people thought about the body (Oliver 2005, 70). The earlier signs of wealth such as pale skin, soft hands and a supple figure which resulted from inactivity were no longer unavailable to most but rather became ordinary (Oliver 2005, 70). In the 1970’ and 1980’s the ideal shifted from not only a slim body but also a tan and muscularly toned body because these qualities were only available to those who had the time and money and self-control to spend on them (Oliver 2005, 71).

The mass media has helped to form the thin ideal and it is not surprising that overweight and obese people are underrepresented in magazines and television shows whereas thin people (particularly women) are overrepresented: the percentage of fat characters is much lower than in reality and the percentage of thin (underweight) characters is much higher than in reality (Pedersen 2010, 7). “Where a character is overweight, there may also be the implication that this says something about his or her character – that they are lazy or unable to control themselves. Such characters are rarely given major romantic storylines and

overweight female characters in particular are frequently found in stereotypical submissive female roles as nurses, cooks or housekeepers” (Pedersen 2010, 8). According to Pedersen (2010, 8) overweight male characters are more likely to be given romantic storylines than overweight female characters.

Pedersen also writes (2010, 8) that while sexist and racial stereotypes in films and television have decreased during the last 20 years, the mocking of overweight characters shows no decline. Female characters are more likely to hear negative comments about their looks from other characters while overweight male characters are more likely to make jokes about their own weight (Pedersen 2010, 8).

It is, however, worth mentioning that not all cultures today see overweight as negatively as the modern Western culture. For example in certain parts of Middle East and Africa brides-to-be are put into fattening rooms or fattening camps to make them more physically attractive, and Buddhist monks are known to be “fat and happy” (Oliver 2005, 62). In fact much of the world still thinks of certain corpulence as a positive thing (Oliver 2005, 61-62). In my thesis there will be a good example of this type of thinking in the case of the Speck people.

### 3. The Case of Nevare Burvelle

In the first part of my analysis I will present in detail the first person narrator and protagonist of *The Soldier Son* –trilogy, Nevare Burvelle, and how different persons and groups of people react to his obesity. In the first part I will analyze Nevare’s own observations and attitudes. In the second part I will illustrate how his fellow Gernians who do not know him show their attitudes to his size through ridicule. The third part is reserved to Nevare’s family and particularly his father. The fourth part tells of how the townspeople of the border town Gettys first reluctantly accept him but with the first possible chance turn on him and are ready to believe anything of him because of his weight. In the fifth part I will present how the Speck people react to Nevare’s bulk.

#### 3.1 Nevare’s Attitudes and Observations

Nevare starts to gain weight right at the end of the first book of the trilogy. Before that point he is depicted as a tall and handsome young man. At that moment he is in the King’s Cavalla Academy to be educated as a cavalla officer as is his role as the second son, soldier son, of his noble father. The Academy was struck with a bad case of the Speck plague and many students, Nevare included, were affected by the disease. At first Nevare’s weight gain is seen as a positive sign since most survivors of the plague remain bone thin and weak for the rest of their lives. “My health came roaring back, and I felt that my body suddenly demanded both exercise and food to restore itself. I was very happy to give it both. When Dr Amicas paid me a surprise visit, he bluntly said, ‘You’ve not only recovered your weight from before your illness, but added a layer of fat to it. Perhaps you should consider controlling your appetite’” (*Shaman’s Crossing*, 526). At this point Nevare is still able to ignore the warning and he simply replies that “My brothers and I always put on a bit of flesh right before we shoot up in height” (*Shaman’s Crossing*, 526). In Nevare’s thinking his weight gain is both a sign of good

recovery and healthy growth. He cannot imagine that something could be wrong with gaining weight in the position he is in, having just survived a plague which had killed several of his comrades and crippled many others so that they are unable to fulfill their roles as soldiers. For Nevare, weight gain is purely a positive sign. Before returning to the Academy after the outbreak of the plague, Nevare also tries on his cavalla uniform: “It seemed snugger than it had when last I wore it again, and I suspected I was due for yet another growth spurt” (*Shaman’s Crossing*, 528). He still keeps with that theory of his weight gain for a while even when during one more inspection with Dr Amicas one of his jacket buttons pops off and Dr Amicas remarks: “Still gaining flesh, I see” (*Forest Mage*, 16).

Nevare’s inner alarm bells do not start to ring even when a group of young noblemen and women mock his weight very clearly during their boat trip when Nevare is travelling home to attend his brother’s wedding.

When he leaves the boat to ride his horse for the rest of the trip, he decides to stop wearing his cavalla uniform which feels uncomfortably tight. His first real observations about his weight gain are strongly connected to the tightness of his uniform. “I had to admit that I’d put on flesh, and more than I had thought I had. I was hungry as I rode, for such exercise consumes a man, yet I was grateful for the short rations I was on. Surely I’d be my lean and fit self again by the time I reached home” (*Forest Mage*, 38). At this point Nevare still thinks that his fat is totally natural and does not believe that it could be of any supernatural origin and it is clear that he believes that normal means – limited eating and physical exercise – will cause him to lose that weight.

The bitter truth about the permanency of his weight starts to reveal itself after Nevare has reached his home. He becomes disillusioned as he sees himself in a large mirror at home:

The weight I had put on was distributed all over me, like thick frosting on a cake. No wonder others had been reacting to me so strangely. No part of me had escaped. As I stared at my face, I was certain that instead of losing weight on

my journey home, I'd added to it. This was not the face I'd seen in my shaving mirror at the Academy. My cheeks were round and jowly and my chin was padded. My eyes looked smaller, as if they were set closer together. My neck looked shorter.

The rest of my body was even more distressing. My shoulders and back were rounded with fat, to say nothing of my chest and belly. My gut was more than a paunch; it was starting to hang. My thighs were heavy. Even my calves and ankles looked swollen. I lifted a fat hand to cover my mouth and felt cowardly tears start in my eyes. What had I done to myself, and how? (*Forest Mage*, 63)

His body is fat all over unlike anything he has ever seen - except in the form of a fat man in the freak show which he had visited in the capital. At this point it becomes clear that he is totally unable to fit into his cavalla uniform and even letting out the seams would not help (*Forest Mage*, 68). His weight gain has gone out of any control he had thought he had. Nevertheless, he is determined to change back to his old self. Despite the illogical way he has gained weight during his journey, he still believes that he will be able to lose the weight. For the three days before his brother's wedding he fasts and joins the working crews toiling on their estates grounds – with no visible change.

During a conversation with his younger sister Yaril, Nevare finally makes a connection between his weight gain, the Speck plague and his dream experiences of the Tree Woman during his illness even though he does not totally understand it at first. He remembers how “Tree Woman had encouraged my Speck-self to gorge himself on the magical essence of dying people” and how fat he had been in that dream vision (*Forest Mage*, 66). Tree Woman had said to him: “Eat and grow fat with their magic” (*Forest Mage*, 66). He also remembers that the fat man in the freak show had claimed to be a former cavalla man until he got the Speck plague. Dr Amicas' interest in his weight gain “now took on a darker significance” (*Forest Mage*, 66). Slowly Nevare understands that his fat is not a result of overeating or lack of exercise but magic of some kind.



While in the real world we do not assume that anyone would gain weight because of magic, this does give some reason for thought. Nevare's weight gain has taken place after he recovered from the Speck plague and Dr Amicas sees it as a rare side effect. This makes one think whether there are in reality things affecting our weights which are out of our own control such as diseases with side effects. Is it possible that it is not always immoderate eating and too little exercise which makes someone fat but some medical condition or perhaps something else like chemicals or pollution? While *The Soldier Son* may not give any direct answers to this, it subtly raises these kinds of questions which are made possible by the mirroring effect of fantasy.

At his brother's wedding Nevare is as fat as ever. There he compares himself with other people who are present:

I had always accepted that with age, men and women became stouter. I had never thought less of a woman whose heavy bosom and rounded belly spoke of years of childbearing. Men of a certain age became portly and dignified. Now I found myself speculating on who was larger than I was and who was smaller. My girth would not have been shocking in a man in his mid-thirties, I decided. It was the coating of fat on a young man that made me so offensive to their eyes. A few of the younger men carried substantial bellies, but they did not sport fat on their arms and legs as I did. It made me look indolent and lazy. (*Forest Mage*, 80)

Nevare's observations fit well together with the view of pre-20th century Western culture. A certain amount of fat is not repulsive but natural, particularly for middle-aged or elderly people. One example of this is from William Shakespeare's play *As You Like It* telling about the fifth age of the man: "And then the justice, / In fair round belly with good capon lined, / With eyes severe and beard of formal cut, / Full of wise saws and modern instances" (Shakespeare, 2.7.156-159).

Even though Nevare's weight gain cannot be linked directly to overeating, he does notice changes in his appetite. Especially when he still tries to lose weight and is fasting, he is

tormented by smells of food as his sense of smell seems to have become more acute. When he is working with his father's hirelings, he is able to smell the food they had eaten as lunch even on their breaths (*Forest Mage*, 70). Hunger becomes his constant companion during his time in his home as he first tries to prove to his father that he is able to control himself and lose his weight and later, as he understands more about his condition, tried to prove that his weight cannot be lost by controlling his food intake. Nevertheless, he finds it hard not to eat: "My hunger, which I could somewhat ignore in the absence of food, became an obsession the moment I could smell or see anything edible" (*Forest Mage*, 158). While his obsession for food does distress Nevare, he learns to enjoy his food in a totally new way, which in a way is also a manifestation of gluttony, "eating every bite as if it were my last and trying to savour the taste in an attempt to make the small quantity satisfying" (*Forest Mage*, 158). "My deprivation became an exercise in sensory exploration" (*Forest Mage*, 159).

He is neither content with small amounts of food even though he only rarely eats his fill. After the small meal whose eating was described above, he muses: "Do not mistake me. I was not satisfied. Hunger opened its maw and roared within me, demanding more. If there had been anything remotely edible in my room, I would have eaten it. I longed for bulk, for large mouthfuls of food that I could masticate and swallow in huge gulps" (*Forest Mage*, 159). Nevare realizes that he would enjoy being gluttonous and eat huge portions but most of the time he resists the compulsion and voluntarily eats moderate portions.

It is worth noting that Nevare's obesity does not cause him any particular health problems. This is probably due to the fact that he does heavy physical exercise nearly all the time which keeps his muscles, heart, and lungs fit even though there is no medical report on his condition after he leaves the Academy where Dr Amicas scrutinizes his eating and exercise patterns and for example asks whether he winds more easily than before.

### 3.2 Ridicule

The first occasion Nevare faces ridicule for his weight is during the boat trip from the Academy to his home for his brother's wedding. There is a group of young noblemen and women who make remarks about his size.

The first occasion is when Nevare, trying to be courteous, is lifting a fallen pencil for one of the ladies when a button from his cadet uniform jacket pops off. This time there is only laughter and a hasty retreat from the scene when Nevare returns from retrieving his runaway button. Later that day one of the ladies remarks to one of her friends: "I've never seen so rotund a cadet!" to which one of her male friends remarks: "Hush! Can't you see that he's with child! Don't mock a future mother!" (*Forest Mage*, 30). In these comments there are two important thought patterns about fat: firstly that as a military cadet Nevare should not be as fat as he is. It undermines his credibility as a soldier. Secondly, it also questions his masculinity as is clear from the quote from the nobleman. Fat is more connected to femininity and childbearing than the body of a young man, particularly the body of a soldier who is supposed to be used to physical exercise and look the part.

The next occasion during the boat trip is when Nevare is descending a narrow spiral staircase into the boat and the group of noblemen and women are waiting for him to get down so that they can climb the stairs. The same male voice which had declared Nevare pregnant says: "Ye gads, what is it? It's blocking the sun! Does it wedge? No sir, it does not! Stand clear, stand clear!" The man is imitating a sailor who takes depth readings and thus compares Nevare to a ship in too narrow and shallow waters. He continues: "Oh, the suspense! Will he make it or will he run aground?" (*Forest Mage*, 31). On the first occasions of mockery Nevare is able to control his anger and embarrassment but this time his Speck side takes control and causes the man to have a nasty fall in the stairs and break his leg by magic. That

was the end of mockery during that journey. As Nevare has not yet accepted that his weight gain has been as huge as it has been, he also has harder time to accept the ridicule.

The next occasion of clear mockery is when Nevare is travelling horseback east from his home. He is starting to run low on food and there are no towns or inns where to buy anything. He stops at a courier station to exchange news and to ask if he could buy some food for himself and his horse. The courier of the station hears Nevare's request and says mockingly: "“You need to buy food? It doesn't look to me as if you've been going without! Or are you fattening up before you hibernate for the winter?”" (*Forest Mage*, 234). Here Nevare is compared to a beast whose instincts tell him to eat before winter. It could imply that he lets his instincts and emotions lead him instead of his rationality – again also historically seen as a feminine rather than masculine feature.

The sergeant in charge declines to sell Nevare any food or even oats for his horse even though Nevare knows that they must be well stocked in fodder. Nevare muses that "Plainly he was lying. I could not discern why, but I suspected it was simply because I was fat. I think he perceived me as self-indulgent, and felt justified, even righteous, in denying me food" (*Forest Mage*, 234-235). He remembers also how when he entered the Academy, one of his fellow cadets, a fat young man called Gord, had been picked as a butt of jokes and rejection by some other cadets without any other reason than simply because he was fat (*Forest Mage*, 235). Fatness would be seen as a justification for dislike for some people Nevare meets. In addition, some would seem to think that a fat person does not need his fair share of food as the common thought pattern is that a fat person has been eating more than his share before, even in cases when this is not true like in Nevare's case.

Not all jokes about Nevare's weight are intended as insults. For example right after Nevare has entered the town of Gettys and has found a barber to shave his beard for him before he feels like presenting himself to the commander of the town's garrison. The barber

jokingly asks Nevare: “How many of these chins would you like me to shave?” At this point Nevare does not take the remark as an insult but laughs and more or less goes along with the joke and answers: “All of them” (*Forest Mage*, 309). This fits into the study result that men more often than women are able to joke about their own weight and while Nevare does not start the joke, he joins it. At this point Nevare has been fat for such a long time that he has to some extent accepted fatness as one of his roles and it makes it possible for him to see what is humorous about himself.

### 3.3 Nevare's Father and Family

There are several ways how Nevare's sudden weight gain affects his relationship with his family and a few other persons close to him such as his intended fiancée Carsina.

When Nevare returns home from the Academy for his brother's wedding, some members of the family hardly recognize him. His mother does not mention his change in any way during the reunion but simply embraces him. His younger sister Yaril is the first one to speak her mind: “You're so fat!” Yaril exclaimed, tactless as she had ever been. ‘What have you been eating at that place? Your face is round as the full moon! And you're so dirty! I thought you'd ride up, all glorious in your uniform. I didn't even recognize you at first’” (*Forest Mage*, 58). His father does not say anything about the subject of Nevare's weight in front of the others but tells him to go to wash himself and then come to see him in his study quite commandingly.

The storm starts in the study:

‘Your brother's wedding is scarcely four days away’, he said heavily. ‘How can you possibly think to undo in four days what sloth and gluttony have accomplished in six months? Did you give a thought to anyone beside yourself when you were allowing your gut to become the size of a washbasin? Do you wish to humiliate your entire family by appearing at a festive occasion in such a state? I am humiliated to think that you have presented yourself thus to the Academy, to my brother, and to everyone who knew your name on your journey home. In the good god's name, Nevare, whatever were you thinking when you allowed yourself to descend to such state? I sent you off

to the Academy a fit and able young man, physically suited to be an officer and a soldier. And look what comes back to me less than a year later!’ (*Forest Mage*, 59)

Nevare’s father does not give a single thought to the fact that Nevare might not be at fault himself but immediately blames him for being slothful and gluttonous. He makes it clear that he thinks Nevare’s appearance is humiliating and totally unfit for a soldier which Nevare is supposed to be.

At this point Nevare is still unaware of what has caused his weight gain. He reports: “I felt guilty and ashamed of my body, but I honestly could not recall that I had over-eaten since I had begun my journey, nor had my pace been what I would call slothful. I spoke the truth. ‘I have no explanation, sir. I don’t know why I’ve gained so much weight’” (*Forest Mage*, 59). His father replies with the truth which he knows and which is commonly believed: “‘If you eat too much, you get fat, Nevare. If you lie about like a slug, you get fat. If you don’t overeat and if you exercise your muscles, you remain trim and soldierly’” (*Forest Mage*, 60). Nevare’s father orders Nevare to go and help a working crew to clear a new pasture of rocks and to fast for the three remaining days before the wedding. He knows it is not enough to return Nevare to his previous state but he believes it can do something to help the situation (*Forest Mage*, 60). Both Nevare and his father believe that normal means will correct the situation. It is in the inner consistency of reality that Gernians initially believe that fatness is mainly self-caused and that limited eating and exercise will help lose the weight. It is not believed that magic could cause weight gain. Here is also a challenging thought to the reader who is likely to believe that overweight and obesity are mainly caused by poor lifestyle choices and can be corrected by making healthy eating and exercise part of everyday routine as Nevare does not respond to this treatment at all. The reader will not think that fat in reality would have magical origins but perhaps that it is not always as straightforward to lose weight as often is told.

Yaril is the next person Nevare has to confront about his change. They had been as close as a sister and a brother of their class could be and Yaril had helped to smuggle his letters to his intended fiancée Carsina and her letters back to him as it would not have been proper to be in continuous correspondence in the open. Nevare is looking down at a pond of fish in their garden when Yaril makes her presence known by asking Nevare: “Planning to eat one?” (*Forest Mage*, 65). She is very angry at Nevare for appearing like he does. She says: “How could you do this to us? I am going to be so humiliated at Rosse’s wedding. And poor Carsina! This is certainly not what she was anticipating! The last two weeks, she has been so excited and happy. She even chose her dress color to go well with your uniform. And you come home looking like this!” (*Forest Mage*, 65). When Nevare tells her it is not his own fault, she retorts: “Oh? Then who has been stuffing food down your throat, I’d like to know?” She is also sure that Nevare has himself to blame for his appearance. For the first time Nevare thinks to blame the Speck plague for the change but Yaril is not willing to buy that since she has seen some of the survivors of the plague and they all had been “thin as rails” (*Forest Mage*, 66). The idea that that particular disease could have somehow caused Nevare’s fatness seems absurd to her.

Yaril has a particular reason to be afraid of the consequences of appearing as fat Nevare’s sister as she was hoping to make a good impression on the parents of a particular young man in the wedding and she fears that Nevare’s appearance will ruin that. “What will Remwar’s family think of me, having such a brother? Will they fear that I, too, will inflate like a bladder?” (*Forest Mage*, 66). She continues about the subject soon saying: “Carsina won’t have you, fat as a hog, and when she looks around, she and her family will take Remwar away from me! He was her father’s first choice for her anyway. You’ve ruined it for everyone, Nevare, you selfish pig!” (*Forest Mage*, 67). Yaril is afraid of the influences Nevare would have on her prospects and paints the worst scenario very clearly for Nevare and it hits home

as Nevare muses: “she’d used her best ammunition to wound me” and her words do make Nevare think whether the scenario which Yaril painted for him could really come true. During his journey home he had one occasion of lust with a farm girl who seemed to like portly men since she commented: “‘It is a pleasure to cook for a man who obviously enjoys his food. It shows a man has a hearty appetite for all of life’s pleasures’” (*Forest Mage*, 34). By those pleasures she apparently means sex as well as good food. However, not all women appear to share this view and Nevare is afraid that Carsina is one of them.

Nevare’s older sister Elisi barely says a word to Nevare, but the attitude to him is pretty much the same as Yaril’s and for partly the same reason. Nevare’s weight gain has been so enormous that he cannot wear his uniform. The family has hired two seamstresses to help with all the sewing before the wedding and they have to make Nevare something presentable to wear very quickly and because of that the gown which Elisi was going to wear is finished in a hurry and the neckline does not look very good. When Nevare is going for the final testing of his clothes, Elisi runs out of the room crying. She says: “‘Then I shall look like a cow! That’s all that can be said, I shall look like a cow!’ As she passed me, she snarled, ‘I hope you are satisfied, Nevare! But for you and your stupid belly, there would be plenty of time to reset the neckline of my dress!’” (*Forest Mage*, 74). Their mother explains the situation to Nevare. There had been an offer for Elisi’s hand and the young man in question was coming to the wedding and Elisi would have liked to look pretty and fashionable there (*Forest Mage*, 75). Just like Yaril, Elisi is also afraid that Nevare is going to ruin her prospects of marriage because of his fatness.

Nevare’s mother is the only one who does not show that she would be upset about Nevare’s sudden weight gain. She never raises her voice about the subject but she is not any more inclined to believe Nevare’s theory about the effects of the Speck plague on him. She says: “‘It’s the starchy food they feed you at that school. I’ve heard about places like that,



trying to save money by feeding the students cheap food. It's probably all potatoes and bread..." (*Forest Mage*, 69). On the plague theory she answers: "Nevare, every young man that I've ever seen who has recovered from the plague has been thin as a rack of bones. I don't think that we can blame this on your illness. I do think that a long convalescence such as you had, with many hours in bed with little to do save eat and read could change a man" (*Forest Mage*, 69). Nevare's mother's theory is the only one which does not put all the blame on Nevare's overeating but also the quality of food which he has been given by others though the inactivity of his convalescence is also a part of her theory. This is the view which is shared by some modern obesity researchers that excess calories from carbohydrates fatten a person more than excess calories from either fat or protein. However, there is nothing more about the subject of food quality in the novels used in the analysis so no further conclusions can be made about it.

The events with Carsina go very much like Yaril had predicted: she will not have Nevare, fat as a hog. "The moment Carsina saw me, her eyes widened in disbelief and horror. She clutched at my sister's arm and said something. Yaril shook her head in disgust and sympathy. Carsina actually retreated a step before she mastered herself" (*Forest Mage*, 81). Carsina tries to avoid Nevare as much as possible and the eventual confrontation is very awkward. She is intent on not having anything to do with him and tries to escape the situation. Finally Nevare's Speck side is so insulted that Nevare ends up cursing her so that she would beg him for forgiveness for her actions before she would die (*Forest Mage*, 91) – a curse whose effects he would later suffer from but more of that in the next part of the analysis. The marriage agreement is dissolved soon after Nevare's brother's wedding. It is apparent that Carsina does not think like farm girl Nevare had had sex with that a fat man could be a good possible husband or in any way desirable. It is as if Nevare has transformed from a man into another kind of being which cannot be taken into consideration when thinking of marriage.

While Nevare does control himself with food despite the always nagging hunger he has, the few weak moments unfortunately happen when his father is there to witness it and thus he is unable to believe that Nevare has not himself to blame for his condition. The first time Nevare's father sees him eating after his return from the Academy is on the morning of the wedding. Nevare manages to eat moderately even though he would have felt like eating just about everything on the breakfast table. However, after he has managed to choose a moderate sampling of the food, he takes his time to enjoy the food slowly and eat every single morsel of it on his plate. The other men of the household have to wait for him to finish before they can depart for the bride's home and they do not appreciate the wait caused by Nevare's apparent enjoyment of food (*Forest Mage*, 76-77). While the amount of food is not gluttonously big, the way Nevare eats it is far beyond the normal enjoyment of food.

The most problematic scenario happens at the wedding. There is a feast laid out and the guests are able to help themselves to their favorites. After his confrontation with Carsina, Nevare does not feel like he would be able to control himself if he helped himself to the food and asks one of the servants to make a portion for himself. He gives the servant clear instructions: "Could you bring me a small portion of meat, a roll of bread and perhaps a glass of wine?" He even repeats his instructions. While he waits for the food to arrive, his father, mother and the bride's parents come to his table. At first they comment on the fact that he is not eating anything as it would be seen as an insult and a sign of disapproval of the wedding not to eat anything. Nevare is able to explain himself by saying: "Everything looked and smelled so wonderful, I did not trust myself to make a choice. I'm sure the serving man will be here directly" (*Forest Mage*, 97). And the serving man is there right then but Nevare's request for some meat, a roll of bread and a glass of wine have transformed into two full platters of food, one filled with all kinds of meats and the other with several types of breads. "Grinning as if he had accomplished some marvelous feat, the serving man placed both

platters before me. He bowed, well pleased with himself. ‘Never fear, sir. I know how to properly serve a man like yourself. As you requested, only meat and only bread. I shall return immediately with your wine, sir.’ He turned with a flourish and left me surrounded by food” (*Forest Mage*, 98). The serving man very clearly thought that a man of Nevare’s size would not have been satisfied by a small portion of meat and a roll of bread and has made his own conclusions about the kind of food he would really like to have as well as the amount of it. He clearly thinks that a fat man cannot be satisfied with a small portion of food, that a fat man has to eat much, gluttonously much.

The huge portion of food puts Nevare into a tricky position. He is aware of the reactions of his and the bride’s parents. “I knew my father was aghast at my wanton display of gluttony. My shocked hostess was striving to look pleased. Worse, I knew that I could consume every bite of it with relish and pleasure” (*Forest Mage*, 98). Nevare tries to politely explain that he did not ask for that much food but in that situation it would also have been impolite to eat only a little bit of the foods or not to touch them at all. So Nevare ends up eating all the food and immersing himself in the enjoyment of it (*Forest Mage*, 98).

After Nevare has finished the food, his father starts his rebuke: “‘I have never been so ashamed of you. Do you hate your brother? Do you seek to humiliate me? What motivates you, Nevare? Do you think to avoid your military duty? You will not. One way or another, I’ll see you serve your fate (...) I warn you. If you will not maintain your body and your dignity and earn a commission at the Academy and win a noble lady as your wife, why then you can go as a common foot soldier. But go you shall, boy. Go you shall’” (*Forest Mage*, 100). At this point Nevare’s father has come up with the idea that Nevare is not interested in a military career and wants to avoid it by becoming too fat to be an officer or a soldier of any kind. In addition, after seeing Nevare eat gluttonously much, even if that is the only time, he is more convinced than ever that Nevare is a gluttonous eater and has caused his own weight gain.

Nevare and his father are at war after the wedding (*Forest Mage*, 103). However, their relationship becomes even more strained as Nevare receives an Honorable Medical Discharge from the Academy meaning that he could not return there and continue with his studies. At this point Nevare's father's thoughts of Nevare trying to avoid his fate as a soldier seem even plausible even though in the letter there is not a word about gluttonous behavior but only the rare side effects of the Speck plague (*Forest Mage*, 108). The basic meaning is enough for Nevare's father: his son was kicked out of the Academy because he was too fat.

Nevare is again put into hard physical labor by his father during the days and he is to control his eating. The final straw that breaks all trust Nevare's father has towards his son happens one night when Nevare has just arrived from a long day's ride from meeting the plainsman Dewara who originally exposed Nevare to magic and who knew more about it than Nevare and would perhaps be able to give him some answers about his state and whether magic really could have a part in it. Nevare has not eaten during the whole day and he stops at the kitchens to have a bite of bread. However, his father finds him there and believes he has been sneaking into the kitchens every night to gobble down food and that keeps him in the state he is in (*Forest Mage*, 152). He orders Nevare to stay in his room and eat only what he is offered. Nevare submits to this partly because at this point he is convinced that his fat is due to his experiences with the Speck magic and he is certain that the treatment would not work on him and he is determined to show that to his father (*Forest Mage*, 155). At first Nevare is still put to work with a watcher at his back and locked into his room for the night and given only one moderate sized portion of food per day but as that gives no visible results, Nevare's father accuses Nevare of bribing his watcher and Nevare ends up being locked into his room all day long. Then when the Speck plague hits the household killing many including Nevare's mother, brother Rosse and sister Elisi, Nevare is forgotten into his locked room for days without any food or drink. He survives only because the Speck magic has changed his

metabolism in such a way that he could enter a nearly hibernating state. No fat was lost, however.

The experience changes Nevare's father in many way but do not endear Nevare to him in the least. Nevare becomes again close with Yaril who survived and together they start to run the household with the reduced staff. Their father takes his time to recover from his illness and the deaths of their loved ones and does not interfere with Nevare and Yaril for a good while.

Then Nevare's father drops the final bombshell. He believes that Nevare fattened himself on purpose so that he would be unfit for soldiering and be able to lie in wait for a disaster like the one that befell them so that he could take his brother's place as the heir son (*Forest Mage*, 203). Finally Nevare's father disowns Nevare and tells him to leave and never come back (*Forest Mage*, 205). In his father's eyes Nevare fails to fulfill his role – the role of a masculine man very typical of fantasy literature. The fact that Nevare manages the household as well as any person put suddenly into charge of things does not affect the fact that Nevare's obesity and failure as a soldier weights more in his father's eyes than his good management of things. The expectations he has for Nevare are crushed by fatness.

### **3.4 The Townspeople of Gettys**

After being forced out of his home, Nevare travels slowly eastward. At first he does not know where to go but eventually he decides to go to the border town of Gettys which lies right next to the Barrier Mountains which are also the home of the Speck people.

Probably the main reason why Nevare gets a rather positive than negative welcome in Gettys is because he is bringing a wounded cavalla scout Buel Hitch with him. First Nevare takes Hitch to the infirmary, then visits the barber to make himself more presentable and goes to meet the commander of the regiment. He has heard stories about how the regiment had

been a top regiment but fallen on hard times since it took its posting in Gettys and it shows in everything in Gettys. Nevare thinks that if there was a regiment into which he would be able to enlist, it would be the regiment in Gettys. He does not believe that any other regiment would let an obese man like himself enlist.

When he first hears Nevare's request to enlist, Colonel Haren says: "'Impossible, man. Don't deceive yourself. You're not fit to be a soldier'" (*Forest Mage*, 313). The typical presumptions are at work here. Colonel Haren does not believe that a fat man like Nevare would be a good or even passable soldier. Even during hard times the Colonel wishes to keep some standards. Only after Nevare asks to be used in any capacity and also hands over the recommendation letter he has gotten from Buel Hitch, will the Colonel allow Nevare to enlist as the new cemetery guard which as a post is not very visible as the cemetery is situated well outside of town.

Very soon Nevare finds out that some people do not need more reason to dislike him than the fact that he is fat which Nevare had already observed. Gettys is a wild place and discipline is not high among the soldiers. One night not very long after Nevare has enlisted, there is a violent rape of a respectable woman by some soldiers. Nevare had nothing to do with it but still a certain lieutenant accuses him of it without having any evidence (*Forest Mage*, 370). "'... I'd say you're a hard man to mistake,'" the lieutenant says, meaning of course that Nevare is bigger than any man in the town and that if he had been guilty, the woman in question would be able to describe him so that everyone would know who committed the crime (*Forest Mage*, 370).

Unfortunately, Nevare's reputation does not improve with time. He is seen as a fat freak who is able to live by himself at the distant cemetery even though the Speck's forest is right next to the cemetery. For most people, the forest is a frightening place because in their silent warfare the Specks send magical waves of fear and discouragement at Gettys and it is at its

strongest in the forest. Nevare, however, becomes immune to it when he is more in contact with the Specks. Nevare is in other words even too good in his unsavory post. His reputation takes a slightly macabre turn when he starts to dig surplus graves in advance for the plague season. In addition, he asks the Colonel to order a warehouse full of coffins so that a decent burial could be guaranteed to everyone even in the middle of the plague season (*Forest Mage*, 346). While this is simply cold logic, some people do not think well of him for preparing so well for other peoples' deaths. In addition, Nevare earns himself the reputation that he harasses women when he meets Carsina in Gettys and Carsina does not want to be known having any connections to a fat man like Nevare and because of that she creates a scene twice with many witnesses.

In addition, Nevare once visits a local whorehouse encouraged by Buel Hitch. There the doorman immediately shouts for one particular prostitute: "'Here's a fellow who'll match you pound for pound'" (*Forest Mage*, 398). The woman in question is not mentioned to particularly fat but extremely tall for a woman. However, the tall woman is not working that evening. One of the prostitutes says outright that she will not take him. "'Don't even look at me,' a raven-haired woman warned me in a fake Landsing accent. She rolled her eyes in disgust that I'd even consider her..." (*Forest Mage*, 399). Apparently Nevare's weight does not appeal to her and she will rather not earn money than be with a man of Nevare's size and looks.

There is, however, one woman who is willing to take Nevare. A girl third of his size is totally willing to pleasure Nevare despite his size. From the first moment she acts as if having him would be rather an honor than an unpleasant duty. I do not believe that despite her actions she would have honestly found Nevare desirable but she is a professional who knows how to please her customers. Fala does acknowledge Nevare's size: she calls him "big man" a few times. In addition, she does not allow Nevare to mount her but releases him with her mouth

though she does all that with elegance and not as if she would particularly try to avoid being under a heavy man like Nevare. The whole situation is loaded with eroticism as Nevare uses his magic to give her an orgasm unlike anything she has ever experienced. (*Forest Mage*, 400-402). This suggests that even fat men can be in some ways sexually desirable and be satisfying sex partners even if in this case magic was a part of it.

That one night's release creates some new problems, however. Fala refuses to take any other men and goes missing a few days later. In the middle of a winter it means most likely a bad end. Suspicions turn immediately to Nevare. One of his few friends, a woman called Amzil, tells Nevare what rumors about the case go around. All the women are convinced that Fala had been murdered by "'a big fat son of a bitch named Never that guarded the cemetery'" (*Forest Mage*, 464). "'They say that maybe she wasn't willing, that you kept her longer in her room than any man ever had before. And that maybe you caught her alone, and maybe she said no, not for any money, and that maybe then you raped her anyway and killed her in anger'" (*Forest Mage*, 465). Nevare does not understand why people would so willingly believe bad things about him but one of the few other soldiers who Nevare can call his friend answers him: "'Well, it's how you are, you know,' Kesey said ponderously. 'Living out here, all alone, near the forest. And being, you know, big like you are. And no one knowing much about you. It's just, well, maybe it makes it easier for them to make up something about you'" (*Forest Mage*, 470). The uncertainty of the unknown makes it possible that the townsfolk can imagine anything about him and his weight and the strangeness it gives him only makes it worse.

Eventually Fala is found strangled dead in a haystack and the investigation of the case gets a bad turn for Nevare as it was a strap from his horse's harness which had been used to strangle the girl and no one is willing to believe that he had been set up. The real murderer, Buel Hitch, who confesses the deed to Nevare at his deathbed, had been very clever when he



had framed Nevare. After he had stolen the strap from Nevare's horse's harness, strangled Fala and hid her body, he had gone to a tavern, gotten drunk and started to spread rumors about Nevare. He had told everyone there that: "you were a nice enough fellow, really, but you had a bit of a mean streak, and a temper where women were concerned. And I hinted that Fala had laughed at you, when you couldn't do the deed with her. We all had a good laugh about that one, a big porker like you trying to prong a tiny little thing like Fala. Everyone knew she'd never lie still for it. She'd mouth a man, but that was all. Did'em all fast, that was our Fala'" (*Forest Mage*, 571). The other men found it easy to believe that Nevare would be unable to have real sexual contact with a woman because of his size, either because he would not be able to reach her over his huge belly or even be impotent because of all the fat. They see an obese man as totally asexual and because that is far from acceptable manliness, they find it humorous. They also find it easy to believe that Fala would have ended insulting Nevare because of his weight and that it would have led Nevare to take revenge on her. Combined to what Kesey said about the townspeople not knowing much about Nevare, Hitch's rumors have a good field to grow.

The last drop falls during the worst plague season. Carsina dies of the plague and is brought to the cemetery. However, because Nevare had unintentionally cursed her to beg for forgiveness before she dies, she wakes from the dead. Nevare takes her into his cabin and tries to do his best to keep her alive but when he goes out to fetch some water, he is attacked and struck unconscious. When he wakes up, he is in a cell, accused of necrophilia, rape and murder. Carsina's body, dead again, had been found in his bed and "'her nightgown was rucked up around her waist'" (*Forest Mage*, 610) which is taken as a proof that he had violated her body.

Combined with his previous assumed harassment of Carsina, the strap from his horse's harness, and all the rumors going around about him and Fala, the townspeople do not need

any further proof to condemn Nevare. He is sentenced to death by hanging by the martial court. However, the women of Gettys are not satisfied with that. In the court one of them stands up and speaks:

'Yet, despite all our efforts, a monster has roamed free among us, raping, murdering and – ' she choked for an instant, but forced herself to go on, 'dishonouring our dead. I ask that the honourable judges imagine the terror that the women of Gettys have endured. Hanging, my friend, is too good for this creature. It offers him too swift an end for his misdeeds. And so we ask that before he meets his end, he receive one thousand lashes. Let any man who thinks to perpetrate such evil against defenceless women witness what his wickedness shall bring him.' (*Forest Mage*, 642)

The women of Gettys' request is generally approved of and Nevare is to receive the thousand lashes before hanging. The punishment is extremely harsh as one thousand lashes would basically mean that a person's flesh is stripped from the bones and he would die slowly and very painfully and there would be only remains left to be hanged. The hate of the "fat monster" is so high that a punishment of this caliber could be imagined. While it is not a direct consequence of Nevare's fatness, it has strongly affected the outcome of the situation.

### 3.5 The Specks

All the previous views of Nevare's fatness have been more or less either reflections of modern or past Western views about overweight. The Speck people offer a totally different point of view to both body image and particularly Nevare's fatness.

From the Gernian point of view, the Speck people are uncivilized and undeveloped. They do not have permanent habitations and they do not cultivate the land but live by hunting and gathering. They wear barely any clothing at all. They do not have any written tradition either and they are highly superstitious.

When Nevare learns more about the Specks, he learns that his own people's lifestyle can also seem silly: building houses in places where there is a harsh winter instead of moving to a better place for the winter. Using clothes which restrict one's movement. Tilling the earth,

planting, weeding and harvesting when the forest grows all needed food by itself. Forcing one's body to hard practice, work and discipline when one could enjoy what the world gives. With the Specks the mirroring effect of fantasy works at its best, showing that the common thought patterns which we take for granted can be seen from the outside as something alien and not necessarily as something superior.

On the whole, the Specks have a different ideal body image from the Gernians. The Gernian ideal body for a man is trained and slim and women should also stay relatively slim. The Specks see body fat as a sign of prosperity which was the case pre-20<sup>th</sup> century. The life of a Speck hunter and gatherer is not depicted as hard and heavy but it becomes apparent that to be able to gain excess weight, one has to know the forest well and be resourceful and clever. Those are qualities which are appreciated and body fat reflects those qualities.

One of the most revealing scenes when we glimpse the Speck mentality about weight is when a Speck woman, Olikea, meets Nevare's female cousin, Epiny. Olikea comments that Epiny looks sickly as she is a slender woman even by Gernian standards. She is also pregnant and Olikea continues: "She looks like a string with a knot tied in it; how can any woman that skinny be pregnant? (*Renegade's Magic*, 95). Thus fat is again connected to the idea of fertility. Olikea herself is compared to a heavy-bodied feline, not fat but far from skinny.

However, the Speck people's attitude to Nevare's fatness has little to do with their general view of body fat. The Specks have mages called Great Ones who store the amount of magic which they are able to use in the fat of their bodies. Thus the fatter the Great One, the more magic he or she can use. When Nevare meets some Specks in the forest, they recognize him as a Great One immediately despite the fact that he is Gernian. The woman, Olikea, comments to her father Kilikurra about Nevare: "'Look at him. He's huge. He could make two of you even now, and yet it is plain that no one cares for him. Think what such a man would look like with proper care'" (*Forest Mage*, 421). The Speck Great Ones have feeders

who bring them food and not just any food but foods which strengthen their magic. It is plain to Olikea that Nevare has not received any of the right types of food and is large despite that fact and she wonders how large Nevare could become if he got the right foods.

Very soon after that initial meeting, Olikea starts to act as Nevare's feeder. It starts with a simple basket full of foods from the forest left at the doorstep of his cabin: mushrooms, roots, fleshy leaves, fruit and honeyed cakes which replenish Nevare in a way he had not experienced in a long time (*Forest Mage*, 433-434). She does not only feed him but has sex with him since a feeder's only responsibility is not simply to feed the Great One but to keep him as content as possible and in addition it would be a great honor to have a Great One's child though Great Ones do not easily have any children. At first Nevare imagines that Olikea is in love with him and finds him desirable for himself but slowly he understands more about the position of the Great One and the Great One's feeder.

Mainly the Specks show great respect to the Great Ones and Nevare does get his share of it as he is not only a Great One but also one of the largest living Great Ones. Kilikurra for example does seem to know that Nevare does not understand everything about the Specks' way of life but as Nevare is a Great One, Kilikurra will not in any occasion say that Nevare is wrong or that he would not know something. Once when Nevare remarks that Kilikurra is instructing him, Kilikurra answers: "Great One, I would never presume to think that I knew anything that you did not. I'm a talkative, foolish fellow. Anyone will tell you that I am known for saying that which needs no saying, and for repeating what folk already know" (*Forest Mage*, 439). Thus he masks his instructions as simple talkativeness since it would be insulting to claim that a Great One was wrong about something.

While Olikea starts to act as Nevare's feeder, she does not show similar respect to him. During their first meeting she accuses him of being rude since he would not immediately speak the Speck language which the Speck part of his soul both understood and could speak.

For Olikea Nevare is a tool to get the other Specks' respect especially since her sister has a Great One of her own.

However, Olikea expects the other Specks to show proper respect to Nevare according to his size. One night she takes Nevare to meet her tribe family. There they meet her sister Firada and Jodoli, the Great one Firada feeds. The sisters have a heated discussion about their Great Ones: Jodoli is not as large as Nevare. Both of them are "still growing", that is that they have not yet reached their potential sizes and thus powers. Size matters relatively much to the Specks' Great Ones. "'Olikea's Great One is bigger', someone said. The voice was not aggressive, but was clearly audible. Murmurs of agreement followed this announcement" (*Forest Mage*, 476). The members of the tribe family go to fetch Nevare some proper foods from what they had gathered. Nevare has a feast of sensations he has not experienced before as he tries all the varied foods the Specks bring him. His Gernian side is not accustomed to most of them and he feels silly being there naked and all, but his Speck side takes partial control of the situation: "My hidden self that the Tree Woman had nourished and educated emerged into his own. He, at least, understood that this tribute was due to him and proper, and he showed his satisfaction in ways that would have made my aristocratic self shudder, had I taken time to consider it. He licked his fingers and moaned with pleasure at some tastes, smacking his lips over others, and licking bowls to obtain every last morsel of the best offered to him. The People adored his praise of the food they brought him" (*Forest Mage*, 477).

The Great Ones are not expected to do any work themselves, they have feeders for that. Nevare, however, has to do some things himself at one point and Olikea's son Likari wonders about it: "'I never saw a Great One do work before,' he said innocently. 'Jodoli does nothing for himself. He does not even pick a berry, or wash his own body. Firada does it all. But you hunt and cook and scrape the skin'" (*Renegade's Magic*, 171).

When Nevare uses a great amount of his stored magic to disrupt the building of the King's Road which was to go through the grove of Speck ancestral trees, he loses most of his body fat. That makes his position less certain. For a while Olikea is uncertain if she should care for him if he is not as big as he was when they first met. Firada has to remind Olikea that she is privileged that Nevare has accepted her as his feeder and Nevare's Speck side is offended that Olikea even considers to abandon her duties to him since as a Great One he is entitled to them also during a time when he is not at his biggest (*Renegade's Magic*, 51-52).

The Specks' respect of the Great One's size means also that Nevare has to regain his size as fast as possible. At this point he has escaped Gettys and his Speck side has taken control of his body and that part wishes to appear like a Great One. In the Specks' wintering grounds on the other side of the mountains he feeds on everything he can and as much as he can to fatten himself. He knows that he needs to face the other Great Ones and he refuses to do so with his powers depleted as that would mean that they would not respect him enough especially since he is not originally a Speck. "If I present myself to them like this, I will never attain the standing I must have. They won't listen to me at all", Nevare says to Olikea (*Renegade's Magic*, 157).

Luckily, Nevare is able to regain much of his size before he needs to meet Kinrove, the largest and the most powerful and influential Great One alive. "The man was immense. Flesh was heaped upon flesh in rolls until the skeletal structure that had once defined him as a man was buried and muted. His body literally over-spilled him; his belly sat in his lap and his head and chin were sunken in the roundness of his shoulders. (...) Kinrove was an object of awe bordering on worship" (*Renegade's Magic*, 236-237). Here, for the first time, there are any references to the health consequences this kind of overweight can cause. Nevare finds himself comparing Kinrove to an invalid war hero who had sacrificed much to serve his country when he looks at Kinrove. "The size of his body obviously hampered him. Despite the scented oils

being rubbed into his feet and calves, his legs looked painful, dusky and swollen” (*Renegade’s Magic*, 237). Thus it appears that the Specks do not respect and serve their Great Ones only according to their magical power to help them but also because the Great Ones have to sacrifice a great deal, including their physical health, to be able to do so.

## 5. The Cases of Gord and Samwell

In the second part of my analysis I will analyse two other fat young men in fantasy fiction. First there is Gord, a fellow cadet of Nevare's in the King's Cavalla Academy. The material on him comes almost exclusively from *Shaman's Crossing* (2005) which is the first part of *The Soldier Son* trilogy. Secondly, there is Samwell Tarly, a noble born young man who is sent to the Nights Watch by his father in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and who becomes one of the characters used as a focalizer.

### 5.1 Gord

Gord is one of Nevare's classmates in the King's Cavalla Academy. Nevare meets him during his first day as they live in the same dormitory though not in the same room. Everything about Gord is filtered through Nevare's observations as he is the first person narrator. The first impression which is given about Gord is: "Gord was a slab of a boy, pale and fat, his neck bulging over the collar of his uniform and his brass buttons tight on his belly. He stood, smiling awkwardly and saying little, at the edge of the group" (*Shaman's Crossing*, 198).

His fatness is strongly stressed at first. The first line he is given is when the group of new cadets is going to the mess hall for dinner: "'I've heard the food's bad here. Same stuff everyday'" (*Shaman's Crossing*, 200). This gives the impression that Gord does have some issues with food and is used to eating well. In the same paragraph Nevare observes that: "He (Gord) was breathing loudly through his nose, as if even going down the stairs was an exertion" (*Shaman's Crossing*, 200) which also implies poor physical condition. Gord's remark about food does not go unnoticed by his fellows: "If it sits still on the plate, likely I'll eat it. Bet you will, too. You don't look like you've been too picky in the past", remarks Rory (*Shaman's Crossing*, 200). The remark is met with laughter by several other cadets.



When the cadets are queuing outside the mess hall Nevare reports: “We could smell the food, and I heard Gord’s stomach rumble loudly” (Shaman’s Crossing, 200). Again Gord is associated with food and gluttony. In the mess hall their “shepherd” Corporal Dent gives the group a lecture about dining habits and the cavalry that “the cavalla flourishes only when the needs of every rider were given equal consideration. Dent’s eyes seemed to linger on Gord as he spoke. (...) He cautioned us also that there was enough food for each of us to have generous servings, but that we should serve ourselves in moderation until we had seen that each man had a fair portion of every dish. (...) Kort rolled his eyes toward Gord, as if to indicate he was the intended recipient of Corporal Dent’s words. Gord’s eyes were downcast, but I could not tell if he stared at the food or avoided Dent’s gaze” (Shaman’s Crossing, 201). His fellows and seniors in the Academy tend to think that Gord is a greedy glutton simply by his appearance.

Gord’s physical fitness does not impress the others. The next morning Corporal Dent is giving the group of first years an inspection. “As scarlet faced Natred groped for a reply, Gord arrived. He came trotting alone, cheeks red and one of his buttons already giving way to his girth. Dent appeared to forget all about Nate as he turned to a new target. ‘Look at yourself, Gorge!’ he commanded, and Natred gave a snort of laughter that Dent ignored. ‘Stand up straight and suck that gut in! What? That’s the best you can do? Who’s in there with you? Or have you a baby on the way?’” (Shaman’s Crossing, 207) Once again a big gut on a man is associated with feminine fertility and unmasculinity. The other cadets are rather relieved to have someone like Gord in their midst because that makes themselves look a bit better than they are and they are able to escape some unwanted attention which goes to Gord. Nevare observes: “I’m ashamed to say that I felt a sneaking relief that Gord was there to hold the corporal’s attention so that his sniping was not aimed at me” (Shaman’s Crossing, 214) “Dent went on for some time in that vein as Gord squirmed in humiliation and Natred nearly

suffocated trying to keep from laughing. I was torn between sympathy for my fellow cadet and my own suppressed amusement. The more Gord tried to hold in his gut, the redder his cheeks grew. I think he might have burst if he had not been rescued by the arrival of the rest of our patrol” (Shaman’s Crossing, 207).

Later the same day the patrol is marched to another building between classes by another Corporal who also takes an interest in Gord: “Halfway to the maths building, he dropped back, to march beside Gord and harangue him to keep in step, stretch his legs and try, for good god’s sake, *try* to look like a cadet and not a sack of potatoes bumping in a market bag. He told Gord to count cadence for us, and then he shouted at him to raise his voice and be heard like a man when the plump cadet could scarcely get his words out for shortness of breath” (Shaman’s Crossing, 211-212). Gord’s physical fitness is clearly not as good as is expected of the cadets as is not his outer appearance.

There are more occasions when Gord is being harassed by corporals such as Corporal Dent.

He (Dent) still fell back beside Gord and criticized him, referring to him again as Gorge and promising him that he’d shave him thin as a rail before his first year was through. Gord strove to keep pace with us, but in truth, his legs were short, so that he lurched and jounced along rather than marched. Dent harangued him all the way back to our dormitory, winning not a few smiles and sniggers from some of the other cadets. Dent did have a clever wit and the sharp observations he made about Gord, how his cheeks kept cadence with the jiggling of his belly and, how he breathed through his nose like a blown horse were piercingly accurate and delivered in such a wondering yet sarcastic tone that even I could not keep my lips from crooking. (Shaman’s Crossing, 217)

Here is again the idea that physical exercise will make a person slimmer combined with reasonable food intake which had been advised already.

The fact that Gord really sweats and his sweat stinks does not earn him fast friends. “He smelled of sweat from marching off his demerits, not a clean man’s sweat, but a sour spoiled-bacon stink. ‘Whew!’ someone exclaimed in soft disdain after he had passed through the

room on his way to hang his coat and get his books” (Shaman’s Crossing, 221). Some other cadets leave the room simply because Gord has entered it.

This far the picture which is presented of Gord is relatively one-sided and totally concentrated on his outer appearance, in other words his fatness. It is very stereotypical as he is depicted through this one characteristic which is concentrated on his looks, his eating, and his poor physical fitness and the sweating which results from that, and he is there as a target of jokes. The general opinion about him is that as he is at that moment, he is not good material for a cavalla officer. However, his character does get some other characteristics as well.

Nevare cannot help but admire Gord’s ability to tolerate the harassment. When Dent rains his nasty comments on him, he simply does his best and keeps a straight face and does not respond in any other way. Even though Nevare admits to himself that Dent’s comments about Gord are accurate, when he sees how Gord takes it all, he feels that they are “childishly cruel” (Shaman’s Crossing, 218). Gord is not in any way admitting that he deserves to be a target of jokes and he is not participating in them in any way unlike stereotypical television fat men.

It becomes apparent that Gord is by no means stupid even though traditionally stupidity is connected to fatness. In fact, Gord is excellent in mathematics. In the class, first five who manage to solve an equation are summoned to the board to show their calculations. Gord is without exception one of them and Nevare, who is not bad at it either, observes: “Each time, his proof was leaner and more elegant than mine, though we had both arrived at the correct answer” (Shaman’s Crossing, 213). A cavalla officer is expected to be civilized and learned as well as able to lead military operations and Gord is doing excellently in all the studies which do not require physical action. Gord is also very helpful to other cadets when he is allowed to be. He begins to assist Spink who has very poor knowledge about mathematics regularly spending hours and hours doing calculations with him.

It is interesting to note that even though Gord's weight is not any result of magic unlike Nevare's, he does not seem to lose any weight. "Life at the Academy did not become easier for our portly friend, for despite drilling and marching of his numerous demerits he grew no leaner, though he did seem to become both stronger and gain more endurance, both for physical exercise and the routine harassment that came with his girth" (Shaman's Crossing, 226). There is no mention that he would be eating particularly more than anyone else and he is eating the same food at the mess with everyone else. However, his strength becomes apparent in a competitive fight against the cadets of another boarding house as Nevare observes: "Gord, for all his tubbiness, was in the thick of it, red-faced, shouting and flailing away. I saw three Bringham House cadets try to bring him down, but he just hunched his head into his shoulders and ploughed toward the flagpole" (Shaman's Crossing, 214).

The Gernians have a very low social mobility. In the case of the noblemen's sons, the first one is destined to be the heir son, the second the soldier son, the third a priest son, the fourth an artist son, the fifth the scientist son and so forth. All the cadets in the King's Cavalla Academy are second sons of noblemen. However, there are at that point two types of noblemen: old nobles and new nobles who were originally soldier sons but elevated into nobility because of their brave actions during the war against the plains tribes. Nevare and his fellow first year cadets with whom he lives are all sons of new nobles. The old nobles' sons typically think that new nobles' sons are not as good as they themselves both in birth rank as well as in civilized matters and a majority of the command think so as well as they are also from the old nobility stock. The new noble sons are culled and sent home much more easily than old noble sons and later new noble sons have harder a time to advance in their careers. Some of the new noble cadets are well aware of the fact and have adjusted to it but Gord is one of those who feel it is unjustified. "I thought all cadets entered the Academy on an equal footing, with equal opportunity to advance", he says at one point (Shaman's Crossing, 277).

In general, Gord is very aware of what is unjust. The conversation between the patrol of first year new noble sons and Corporal Dent goes on for a good while about the fact that they are all equally soldier sons and not noble sons. The conversation gets a religious turn as Gord starts to recite the holy Writ: “Let every man take satisfaction in the place the good god has given him, doing that duty well and with contentment” (Shaman’s Crossing, 278). It was not a good decision for Gord to recite the Writ.

The colour rushed up to Corporal Dent’s face again. ‘You, a soldier!’ Scorn filled his voice. ‘I know the truth about you, Gord, at least. You were born a third son, and meant to be a priest. Look at you! Who could imagine you were ever born to soldier? Fat as a pig, and more fit to be preaching than brandishing a sabre in battle! No wonder you argue by quoting holy Writ at me! It was what you were meant to know, not fighting!’ (Shaman’s Crossing, 278-279)

Even though Gord explains the situation, his fellow cadets get a permanent doubt about Gord. He says that he was born as a twin and they were cut from their mother’s womb. The first baby that was lifted from their mother had been small and lifeless while he had been strong and robust so the priest who attended the birth had pronounced that he was clearly the elder of the two and thus the soldier son and that the priest son had perished (Shaman’s Crossing, 279). Even Nevare wonders if the priest had been wrong about the babies’ ages and that Gord had really been meant as a priest and not a soldier.

That revelation together with the fact how much time and effort he spends with Spink’s mathematics tutoring causes Gord to receive a new nickname: bessom Gord as bessoms are priests who instruct new acolytes. Some say that he is giving Spink “catechism lessons”. Gord takes all this stoically. “Stoic as a priest”, even Nevare finds himself thinking (Shaman’s Crossing, 281). Gord is mockingly asked to bless the marching groups by senior old noble cadets (Shaman’s Crossing, 281).

While Gord himself takes all the insults as if they did not exist, Spink does not react to them as calmly. One evening when the group of cadets is working on their homework in their

common room, Trist, the cadet who dislikes Gord the most and rivals Spink for the role of the leader of the group, says: “Bessom, can’t you teach catechism elsewhere? Your acolyte is quite noisy” (Shaman’s Crossing, 283). The fact that Spink was included into the name calling and that Trist overturns an inkwell on his papers and books, makes them start a fight. Fighting is strictly forbidden in the quarters and the fact that no one goes to report the fight puts everyone’s staying in the Academy uncertain. Only one person leaves the room when the fight starts: Gord. “‘He’s gone!’ Oron exclaimed. Then, without even a breath between, ‘He’s gone to report us, I’m sure of it. That treacherous bastard!’” (Shaman’s Crossing, 287). Without any proof some of the other cadets are immediately ready to believe that Gord would do something like that. He has never done anything bad to them but they simply dislike him because he is fat and because they dislike him, they are ready to believe anything bad about him. Even Nevare finds Gord easy to blame for things even though he considers Gord a friend.

However, Gord had not gone to report them but he had left before the brawl really started so that he would not witness it and would not need to report it by the honor code. He is saving himself from a morally problematic situation. Unfortunately, he ran into some old noble senior students who gave him a beating simply because he was a new noble son. Nevare and Spink are summoned to walk him back to their house. Before they leave the infirmary, Dr Amicas instructs Gord to take his painkiller powder and also “‘And eat less, Cadet! If you weren’t fat as a hog, you’d have been able to put up a better fight, or at least run away. You’re supposed to look like a soldier, not a tavern keeper!’” (Shaman’s Crossing, 297). So even the medical experts think that Gord has himself to blame for his condition and that it is not proper for him to be as fat as he is if he is to be a good soldier.

Outside the infirmary Gord, Spink and Nevare have a heated discussion about the fight which Gord had fled and the beating which he had received. Spink says: “‘I’d think you’d be

grateful to me, for standing up for you when you hadn't the spine to do it for yourself!" (Shaman's Crossing, 298). To this Gord replies: "I'm a man grown, Spink. I'm fat, and perhaps that is a fault or perhaps it is just the way the good god made me. But it does not make me a child nor does it make me any less in command of my own life. You think that I should fight those who are cruel. The doctor back there thinks I should change myself so they would have less excuse to be cruel to me. But what I think is that I should not have to do either" (Shaman's Crossing, 298-299). He knows that he would not prevail in a physical confrontation and that he should not even try because it would just show everyone that he thinks physical strength solves everything. When Spink says that there in the military it does, he acknowledges that in the base level it does but not in the officer level as the troops would be able to overcome any officer by force if they wanted to. A leader should lead by example and intelligence and Gord is not willing to set the example that he can be physically bested (Shaman's Crossing, 299-300). "If you fight Trist again, know that you are not fighting for me, but for yourself. You seek to salve your own bruised pride, that you have to accept help from someone who is fat. Somehow, you think that reflects badly on you, and that is why Trist can goad you to fight. But my battles belong to me, and I'll fight them in my own way. And I shall win" (Shaman's Crossing, 300).

There is, however, one thing the other cadets envy Gord for: he has a fiancée who adores him. The subject comes up when most of the cadets are going to visit their relatives near the city. Even though he had been beaten the night before, Gord is leaving in good spirits.

'... I always enjoy staying with my uncle. And Cilima will be visiting there as well. She lives only a few miles from my uncle's house.'

'Who is Cilima?' I demanded, and all around me, the other cadets paused to hear the answer.

'My fiancée,' Gord asserted, and suddenly blushed a deep red. There was some skepticism and mockery, but he quietly produced a miniature of a raven-haired girl with large black eyes. Her beauty stunned me, and when Trist archly asked if she knew the fate that awaited her, Gord replied with dignity that her affection and belief in him were the keystone to his persevering through difficult

times. Again, I was struck by the realization that there seemed to be more to Gord than any of us had imagined. (Shaman's Crossing, 311)

In fact, Gord is not only lucky to have a beautiful fiancée who adores him, he is also the first one to be married. Most cadets like Nevare were expecting to graduate from the Academy and earn a commission before being married with their fiancée but when the Speck plague hits the capital and everyone is afraid for their lives, Gord and Cilima are allowed to be wed “and taste what little of life they might be allowed” (Forest Mage, 7) though both are lucky not to get ill with the plague. Nevare observes that “Although Gord was still teased by all and despised by some for his fat, his new status as a married man agreed with him” (Forest Mage, 7). Gord's fatness does not affect his relationship with Cilima negatively. Later when Nevare thinks about the chances that Carsina might not reject him even though he has gained weight, he thinks that Gord had Cilima's affection despite his fatness. However, Nevare also observes that Cilima probably had seen Gord only as fat and never as a lean man and that most likely the weight gain Nevare had experienced in a short period would affect Carsina negatively.

While Gord faces just the same prejudices as Nevare for his size and in many ways is treated the same, Gord is nevertheless able to stay at the Academy despite his fatness. The plague kills a good number of cadets in the Academy and many of the survivors are no longer physically fit to continue their studies and would not be soldiers of any kind. What is ironical is that the plague survivors remain bone thin whereas Gord has been accused of being too fat but it is he who is able to stay instead of the thin ones. He even got invited to the new commander's office to talk about his future as he is brilliant in mathematics and engineering (Forest Mage, 8). Gord is lucky in the sense that despite his looks his intelligence is appreciated in the King's Cavalla Academy.



## 5.2 Samwell Tarly

Samwell Tarly, in most cases called simply Sam, is the eldest son of lord Randyll Tarly from the southern parts of the Seven Kingdoms in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. At first he appears in the chapters which concentrate on Jon Snow as focalizer character but when their roads separate, Sam also becomes a focalizer character in the third part of the series *A Storm of Swords*.

Jon meets Sam quite soon after he has arrived at the Wall himself. The Wall, built of ice, is the northern boundary of the Seven Kingdoms. It is guarded by the Night's Watch, a group of men who are sworn to leave behind all their previous attachments of love, family and land. They are to serve no king and father no children. Once one has sworn the oath to become a brother of the Night's Watch, there is no going back. Desertion is punished by death. There are few men who join voluntarily and for that reason many men of the Night's Watch are bastards, ex-criminals or otherwise in disfavor and they have decided to join since after they have "taken the black", as the men of the Night's Watch wear only black, and having sworn their oaths, their past sins are forgiven and they can live their lives at the Wall.

Beyond the Wall there is a frozen wilderness which is inhabited by wildling tribes which try from time to time to raid the lands south of the Wall and around the time of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* books, that is the main worry of the Night's Watch even though they are aware that in the past there have been some more sinister forces they have had to keep at bay.

Sam first appears during a new recruits' sword practice session. "Through the eye slits of his helm, he (Jon) beheld the fattest boy he had ever seen standing in the door of the armory. By the look of him, he must have weighed twenty stone. The fur collar of his embroidered surcoat was lost beneath his chins. Pale eyes moved nervously in a great round moon of a face, and plump sweaty fingers wiped themselves on the velvet of his doublet. 'They... they told me I was to come here for... for training,' he said to no one in particular" (*A Game of Thrones*, 259). This is the first impression the recruits and the reader get of Sam. His

description does not differ greatly from those of fat Nevare or Gord – he is once again one of the fattest persons people around him have seen, there is stress on the roundness of the face and the several chins.

Immediately Sam gets his share of name calling and other types of harassment. Surprisingly, it is not the other recruits who start it but the weapons instructor Ser Alliser Thorne whose first comment is: “‘It would seem that they have run short of poachers and thieves down south. Now they send us pigs to man the Wall. Is fur and velvet your notion of armor, my Lord of Ham?’” (*A Game of Thrones*, 260). Sam does have his own armor but since it is not black, he has to get something from the armory. That is not a simple task as there is next to nothing that would fit him as such: “His girth required Donal Noye to take apart a mail hauberk and refit it with leather panels at the sides. To get a helm over his head the armorer had to detach the visor. His leathers bound so tightly around his legs and under his arms that he could scarcely move. Dressed for battle, the new boy looked like an overcooked sausage about to burst its skin” (*A Game of Thrones*, 260). There is nothing soldierly or warrior-like in the form of Sam.

Unfortunately, his performance with a sword is not any better. Ser Alliser puts the strongest recruit, Halder, against “Ser Piggy” and the result is messy: “The fight lasted less than a minute before the fat boy was on the ground, his whole body shaking as blood leaked through his shattered helm and between his pudgy fingers. ‘I yield,’ he shrilled. ‘No more, I yield, don’t hit me.’ Rast and some of the other boys were laughing” (*A Game of Thrones*, 260). However, Ser Alliser urges Halder to beat Sam with the flat of his sword until Sam would get up and grasp his sword again. Halder hits him a few times, cracking the leather of Sam’s armor and making him howl in pain. At this point Jon has had enough of the cruel and unjust treatment and he intervenes. To that Ser Alliser says: “‘The Bastard wishes to defend his lady love, so we shall make an exercise of it.’” He makes two other boys to join with

Halder against Jon and Sam though two boys voluntarily join Jon's side. They beat the other boys and the session ends as Ser Alliser leaves calling it "a mummer's farce" (*A Game of Thrones*, 261-262).

Sam has been on the ground all this time. After the fight is over, he rises to thank his saviors. When he is asked why he did not rise and fight back he answers: "'I wanted to, truly. I just... I couldn't. I didn't want him to hit me anymore.' He looked at the ground. 'I... I fear I'm a coward. My lord father always said so'" (*A Game of Thrones*, 263). The other boys are struck speechless at the proclamation that someone would call himself a coward. When Jon tries to cheer him up that the next day he would do better, Sam says: "'No I won't,' he said, blinking back tears. 'I never do better'" (*A Game of Thrones*, 263). It is clear that Sam has a very low self-esteem at least when it comes to fighting. He even names the source of it: his father.

The picture that is given of Sam is not very positive: he is fat and totally unable to fight. He is afraid of fighting and unwilling to even try. In addition he fears or dislikes discomfort and everything violent as becomes apparent when Jon asks him about hunting (Sam's family's sigil is a striding huntsman), high places and the cold. On the other hand, Jon finds Sam's declaration of cowardice courageous in a way. "The world is full of cravens who pretend to be heroes; it took a queer sort of courage to admit to cowardice as Samwell Tarly had" (*A Game of Thrones*, 264). Sam is being more open and honest about himself than many others who pretend to be braver than they really are. For that Jon admires Sam.

Sam tells the story of how he ended up at the Wall to Jon. He had been born as the heir of a rich family with a famous sword made of Valyrian steel. However, he had never fulfilled the expectations his father had had. Sam had grown to be "plump, soft and awkward" and had preferred music, reading and kittens to anything warlike which made him feel sick (*A Game of Thrones*, 268). His father had hired several weapons instructors to make a knight out of

Sam but they had just made him more and more afraid of fighting and anything that had to do with it. When Sam had had a little brother who showed more promise towards knighthood than Sam, their father had abandoned Sam to his favorite pastimes until his fifteenth birthday. That day Sam's father had Sam taken to a nearby forest where he told Sam that he would not have Sam as his heir and the inheritor of their family sword. Sam would have two options: either he would announce that he would take the black and join the Night's Watch leaving it all behind or he would have "a hunting accident" and be killed. Sam chose to take the black.

Sam's story shares some features with Nevare's relationship with his father: both sons are unable to fulfill their father's expectations and are forced out of the family because of that. Nevare had shown promise earlier but by getting fat and discharged from the Academy, had failed his father's hopes. Sam, however, had never reached his father's expectations at any level because he had been fat from the beginning and never good material for a warrior. The heritage of their family's sword is one important matter and his father would be ready to kill his own son rather than give a famous weapon to a man who could hardly even hold it properly. Sam is expected to be something he cannot be.

While Sam's situation shares features with Nevare, he is also very much like Gord. Neither of them performs well in physical confrontations but they have keen minds. Jon manages to persuade the command to take Sam out of initial training. "Lord Randyll couldn't make Sam a warrior, and Ser Alliser won't either. You can't hammer tin into iron, no matter how hard you beat it, but that doesn't mean tin is useless," Jon explains and asks that Sam could be made into one of the stewards helping old Maester Aemon with the letters and the ravens which carried messages (*A Game of Thrones*, 450-451). While everybody thinks Sam would be useless in a fight, there are several other positions in the Night's Watch which Sam could fulfill without any skills in fighting and excel in them.

While Sam's intelligence is not shown with as clear examples as Gord's was with mathematics and engineering, it becomes clear that Sam has wit and foresight in some cases when the others don't. When Jon is chosen to be a personal steward of Lord Commander Mormont instead of a ranger which he had wanted and expected to become, Sam is the one who sees the reason why. Sam explains to Jon that even though his duties will include menial tasks such as changing bed linen and serving food, he would be following Mormont everywhere and be a part of everything Mormont does. It was the same with Sam and his father before his little brother grew up a little. Sam's father had wanted his heir to be with him and so Sam concludes that Lord Commander Mormont intends to make Jon the next Lord Commander. "He wants to groom you for *command*" (*A Game of Thrones*, 520).

Sam's observations became again handy when two slain men of the Night's Watch are found in the woods beyond the Wall. The others assume that they were killed recently by the wildlings but after Sam reluctantly looks at them, he immediately knows they are not fresh from the fact that the blood in their veins has dried rather than being either still flowing or clotted. Sam's father had made him look at many killed animals so that Sam had had to observe the blood (*A Game of Thrones*, 556). Sam's father had tried to harden his son with blood but it had had the opposite effect.

Sam has a love of books. He had read every book in his family library and he is nearly ecstatic in the library of Castle Black where there are probably a thousand handwritten volumes of history of the Night's Watch. He knows how to appreciate both accounts of past ranging parties as well as food inventories as he is aware that they tell much about the past strength of the Night's Watch and their way of life. The history of the Night's Watch is several thousand years old and much of it is forgotten and Sam expresses his wish to go through and inventory all of it. However, as weak as the Night's Watch is at the moment, even he cannot be spared but he is taken with the expedition to go beyond the Wall. He is not

expected to fight but to take care of the messenger ravens because Maester Aemon is blind and too old and fragile for such a journey. Like always, Sam is reluctant as the journey is likely to include danger but he has little choice.

It is interesting to note that even Sam does not lose any weight so that it would be mentioned. It is the same as with both Nevare (for magical reasons) and Gord. He does find some backbone, though, as he says after travelled beyond the Wall for some time that he is not afraid anymore. He says: “I may be craven, but I’m not *stupid*. I’m sore and my back aches from sleeping on the ground, but I’m hardly scared at all” (*A Clash of Kings*, 154).

His fear does emerge again when he is confronted by battle and death but despite that he becomes a hero of sorts. When he and a few of his companions are facing an Other, a terrifying creature intent on killing them and turning them into its undead slaves, Sam manages to strike his obsidian dagger into its throat and kill it. No steel had worked on them but only either fire and, as he realizes then, obsidian which is also called dragon glass and dragons mean fire. Sam had found a new way to kill those creatures and he gets the nickname “Sam the Slayer” for that. Despite his fat, Sam has become a hero.

Sam is not very fond of his new nickname. He feels it is a new type of mockery. He thinks it falls into the same category as calling the biggest man of the Watch “Little Paul” and a small but fierce man “The Giant”. His friend Grenn says that it is not true since Sam really did kill an Other which is more than any of the others had managed. Sam still cannot take the credit because “... I was *scared!*” (*A Storm of Swords 1: Steel and Snow*, 473). Grenn says that he was just as scared and that bravery probably just resulted from pretending to be brave, that no one is naturally brave. That would make Sam just as brave or just as craven as anyone else. The fact that he has acted to kill the Other had been enough bravery no matter how scared he had been. He had deserved his title “the Slayer”.

In *A Feast for Crows* Jon, who had been made the new Lord Commander partly helped by Sam's scheming, sends Sam away from the Wall to the Citadel to be trained as a maester (*A Feast for Crows*, 117). Only those with keen mind and ability to study are able to become maesters and this is a tribute to Sam's mental abilities.

## 5. Conclusions

The three fat young male characters which I have analyzed all share several common features. They are all among the fattest people the others have ever seen despite their youth. Nevare observes that part of the offensiveness about them is that fat is more acceptable for older men and women but not for young men who are supposed to look lean and fit. The fact that Nevare, Gord and Sam are all expected to be soldiers or warriors makes their fat even more unacceptable in the eyes of the others. They do not fulfill the masculine expectations of an able-bodied, fighting male of fantasy literature because of their fatness. Thus the reactions the others have can much be explained with the fact that in a fantasy world men are expected to be able to fight and failing to do so has even more severe consequences than in other literary genre or in the reality.

All three face several types of ridicule. Nevare and Gord are both accused of being pregnant. Their fat is connected to the idea of feminine fertility which compromises their masculinity very strongly. In addition effeminizing them refers also to their mental capacity as in historical and in most cases fantastical contexts females are more connected to emotional and instinctive responses to things (over-eating one of them) and men to rationally thought responses (over-eating is not rational and men should not succumb to it). They are also referred to with names of animals in expressions like “fat as a hog” or “Ser Piggy”. Nevare is also asked if he is fattening before hibernating like an animal. Animals are thought to act on instincts and comparison to them compromises again their mental capabilities as men.

However, all of them are rather intelligent than stupid unlike they are accused. Nevare is doing well with his studies on all fronts though Gord is even better in mathematics and engineering. Sam has insight on things the others do not necessarily have, he has good learning from books and he is to be trained as a maester. Even though they might not have the



strongest possible bodies, they have their wits to use instead. They are not useless despite their fat. Gord and Sam are acknowledged for that, Nevare not so much.

Fatness affects also their desirability. Nevare meets one Gernian girl who likes his corpulence (Nevare has not yet reached his fattest though he is clearly fat during the meeting) and Speck Olikea wants to have him particularly because he is a Great One. In most other cases his fatness is more a hindrance than an asset. Carsina leaves him because of his weight gain. The fact that the other men in Gettys think that he is not sexually able is one of the things which are his undoing in Gettys. Gord is lucky to have a girl who likes him the way he is though that fact does get some doubt from his fellow cadets at first.

Gord is the only one with no trouble about his weight from his family. Both Nevare and Sam disappoint their father in a major way. Nevare's father tried to force Nevare to lose weight and make himself worthy of becoming an officer with no effect for which he puts blame on Nevare and he ends up driving Nevare out of their home and disowning him. Sam, who was naturally inclined to be soft, was being forced into the mold of a knight with opposite results and when his little brother showed more promise, their father sends Sam to the Wall to be out of the way or he would rather have killed his own son to remove him.

Fatness also makes some people automatically dislike Nevare, Gord and Sam. They do not need to say or do anything but just be seen. That automatic dislike makes it also easier for the others to blame them for things they have not done. In Nevare's case it leads to a sentence of lashes and hanging and in Gord's case just being accused of being a sneak without any evidence but the principle is the same: if you are fat, you must have other unwanted characteristics as well.

However, despite all the problems they face, all of them are able to fulfill the role of a soldier or a warrior in some ways at least: Nevare is allowed to enlist in Gettys, Gord is able to continue his Academy studies with great promise and Sam becomes "the Slayer" by killing

the Other despite his fear. Nevare shows most promise from the start and does fulfill the criteria for a soldier otherwise but with his looks but he is the most unlucky of the three in terms of soldiering as his fatness sets him too far apart from the others and helps them to imagine horrible things about him and condemn him of the deeds he is wrongly accused of. Sam who is otherwise the least warrior-like of the three is the one who accomplishes the clearest feat of strength.

One of the things which are noteworthy is that none of them loses any weight by conventional means, that is by limited eating or exercise. Nevare becomes slim again but it happens because of the Speck magic leaving him after finishing his job in stopping the conflict between the Specks and Gernians. Gord and Sam remain about as fat as they were in the first place despite the fact that their eating is not reported to be excessive and they have had more physical activity than previously. Maybe this is a statement for the set-point theory meaning that they are naturally inclined to remain heavy and resist any loss of weight.

One of the aims of my thesis has been to highlight the attitudes to fatness, the ways they are grounded and the ways how they are sometimes unjust. Nevare's weight gain is not his own doing despite his few lapses to overeating. Gord and Sam may have been fond of good food in the past but limited eating and exercise do not help them becoming slimmer, which is, again, no fault of theirs. All of them are intelligent young men, not simpletons with no mental control over themselves. All of them are able to fulfill their roles as soldiers or warriors in some ways despite their fatness. Still despite these facts they are treated as if they would be unworthy and offensive just by looking the way they do. I wanted to draw attention to these things.

While my thesis, in my opinion, gives a relatively clear picture about what the attitudes to fatness in fantasy literature are or can be, it is naturally not a comprehensive study as it was necessary to limit the number of works and characters in the analysis. *A Song of Ice and Fire*

for example presents several other fat characters who could have been mentioned though none of them are even nearly as thoroughly presented as Sam. Most of them are older men in positions of power and they would have given a slightly different array of attitudes to fatness though even with them the attitudes are not as positive as with most normal weight men.

All the characters in this study were also male. It partly reflects how masculine fantasy actually is though there would have been a few fat females mentioned in the works which I used. None of them were, again, as well documented as Nevare, Gord or Sam. Three fat females appear in *The Soldier Son* and two of them are Great Ones and one a fat woman on display in a freak show. One is mentioned in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and she is the fattest daughter of a nobleman with several daughters and granddaughters. The father promises another nobleman the weight of the girl he chooses in silver and the man chooses the fattest of the girls.

There are also some other works of fantasy where there are fat characters. For example in *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien one of the thirteen dwarves, Bombur, is famously fat though his personality is left at the level of a glutton. In *The Lord of the Rings* Frodo's companion Samweis Gamgee is called "the fat hobbit" several times. It is likely that Samwell Tarly's name was partly inspired by Samweis if not the whole character.

My study concentrates strongly on masculinity and unmasculinity of fantasy literature's character. The group which I decided to study is a very marginal one as fat characters are rare. It could be interesting to study also another relatively marginal group of characters, that is females and their femininity especially when it comes to main female characters who are much more rare than the male ones. It would be interesting to track how feminine or masculine the female characters are.

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